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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY.

November
1993

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MILLION

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Graham Joyce
Cherry Wilder
and others

Stephen King
on J.K. Potter

Nicholas Royle
story and interview





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STEPHEN KING

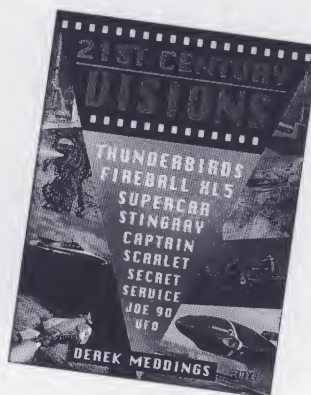
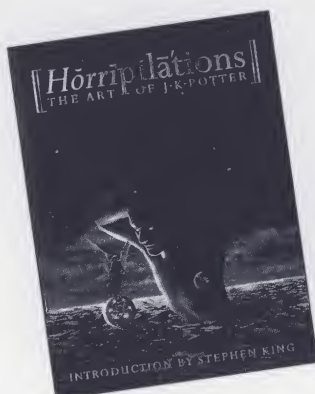
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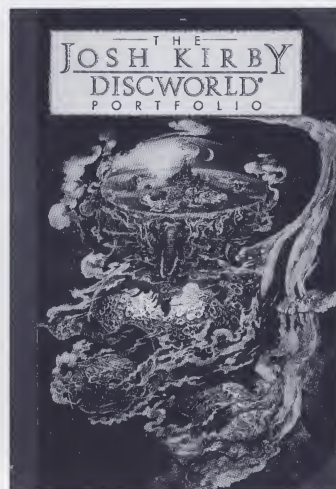
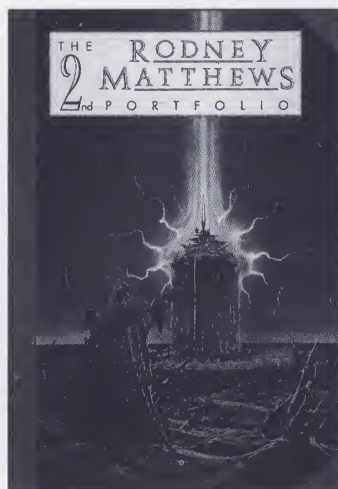
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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 77

November 1993

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Interaction

Dear Editors:

H.P. Lovecraft was once asked whether he would reply to some attack upon him; he said no, remarking of the attack: "It refutes itself." This anecdote occurred to me as I read Colin Munro's hysterical letter (*Interzone*, no. 75) concerning my article on Stephen King. I shall therefore not write a response to Munro (for none is needed) but more a sort of commentary on it.

Evidently Mr Munro is incensed that I have "attacked" Stephen King, and done so in such a way as to "insult" him (Munro). Let me say that it was not my intention to do either; I was merely uttering what I take to be three facts: 1) Stephen King is popular; 2) Stephen King is a bad writer; and 3) Stephen King must therefore appeal primarily to those readers who do not have well-developed literary tastes. Since Mr Munro does not dispute either of my first two points, not even the second (he presents no defence of King as a writer), he cannot rightly dispute my third, which follows from it. Accordingly, all Munro can do is to label me an "elitist," as if by so branding me he has settled the argument.

Let us consider the sociology of this term "elitist" – or, rather, the pejorative connotation it has recently gained. There is something that I call the "democratic fallacy": the notion that political and legal equality (very good things in themselves) somehow produce intellectual and aesthetic equality. This is manifestly false. Some people will always be more intelligent and more aesthetically sensitive than others. It is only these people who can appreciate great art, and that is why great art is always the province of the few. These are facts, and they must be acknowledged no matter how unpopular or politically incorrect they may be. It was a presumable democrat, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said: "...neither the caucus, nor the newspaper, nor the Congress, nor the mob, nor the guillotine, nor fire, nor all together, can avail to outlaw, cut out, burn or destroy the offence of superiority in persons." Art is not a democracy; it is always an aristocracy of excellence.

There may, of course, be some elitists who scorn popular literature altogether (very understandable, since the majority of such literature is rubbish), but I am not one of those people. The only reason I study weird fiction at all is to sort out those works of genuine literary merit from the torrents of trash that have always qualitatively dominated the field. This is the only way to ensure that weird fiction will take its place as a viable form of aesthetic expression. Vaunting the trash as

expressions of "popular culture" will not do the trick.

Why did I write my article at all if I dislike King? (A better question is why I wasted two months of my time reading King's collected works.) The article was part of my forthcoming book on *The Modern Weird Tale* (and Mr Munro will no doubt be happy that that book does not yet have a publisher!). Initially, I only wished to discuss those authors who are of genuine literary value; I would willingly have dispensed with King altogether, but felt obliged to treat him because he is such a force in modern weird fiction. He is what I would call a *bad but important* writer: bad in the absolute aesthetic sense, but important because he influences so much other writing in the field. How is one to avoid him?

Mr Munro commits a puzzling logical error by accusing me of "double-think" because I maintain that King is a bad writer, that he is popular, but that the "quality of King's work does not warrant his popularity." I never made that last assertion, and cannot imagine doing so: it is precisely because he is a bad writer that he appeals to so many. Stephen King deserves his popularity, and readers deserve him. In a democracy people always get what they deserve. There is a fundamental principle at work here. H.P. Lovecraft was aware that the cleavage between "high" and "low" (or popular) art was a direct result of the emergence of capitalistic democracy:

"Bourgeois capitalism gave artistic excellence and sincerity a death-blow by enthroning cheap amusement-value at the expense of that *intrinsic excellence* which only cultivated, non-acquisitive persons of assumed position can enjoy. The determinant market for written...and other heretofore aesthetic material ceased to be a small circle of truly educated persons, but became a substantially larger...circle of mixed origin numerically dominated by crude, half-educated clods whose systematically perverted ideals...prevented them from ever achieving the tastes and perspectives of the gentfolk whose dress and speech and external manners they so assiduously mimicked. This herd of acquisitive boors brought up from the shop and the counting-house a complete set of artificial attitudes, oversimplifications, and mawkish sentimentalties which no sincere art or literature could gratify – and they so outnumbered the remaining educated gentfolk that most of the purveying agencies became at once reoriented to them. Literature and art lost most of their market; and writing, painting, drama, etc. became engulfed more and

more in the domain of amusement enterprises."

To summarize this argument succinctly: Stupid people will always outnumber intelligent people; in a capitalistic democracy stupid people have the power to influence the production of art by their buying power, and so art will bring itself down to their level. Stephen King has many times the readers of Homer and Vergil and Dante and Goethe and Shakespeare; but the latter will always be the pinnacles of Western art, not because of some evil conspiracy on the part of the elitist few, but because these writers *really* are the pinnacles of Western art. Numbers signify nothing; this is another aspect of the democratic fallacy. If mere popularity were the hallmark of literary greatness, then King, Harlequin romances, and pornography would be the greatest literary products of Western civilization. I hope even Mr Munro will grant that they are not.

In many ways my article was directed not "against" King himself (who has rarely made pretensions to literary greatness) but against so-called "Stephen King scholars" who are vaunting him far beyond his level. One writer on King called him a greater writer than Dostoevsky; another one placed him on a par with Hawthorne and Faulkner. If this is not gibberish, I don't know what is.

S.T. Joshi

Hoboken, New Jersey

Dear Editors:

I much enjoyed Chris Gilmore's review of my novel *Snow* in your July issue. It was an unusual honour to have a critic review a book of mine, since they are always – due to their revolutionary nature – scrupulously shunned by the establishment, and I appreciate his and your kindness.

I think he's completely right about the spelling of "born" – an oversight, but on the mix up of "sunk" and "sank," I think you have to allow poetic licence. Shakespeare liked to commit all sorts of grammatical horrors, and these sort of things give poetry bite and charm.

And this is really the point I'd like to make. A smooth and refined style is a beautiful thing. I hope at times in my novel I have achieved this, but I hope this is only in passages where the situation demands it. In other passages, moments of scorn or drama, horror or anxiety, I hope the style is not smooth at all. In fact I hope it is respectively slangy, frantic, turbid and jerky. Herein lies the art of expressiveness.

The sentence Mr Gilmore singled out was indeed jerky and ungainly in

the extreme, but it was describing a house agent's horrified vision of the ghost of Hedda Gabler jerkily descending a staircase. To have conveyed all this with a style of eyes-rolled-up, languid Proustian beauty would be daft! It would also get a confused and inartistic effect.

There are loose ends, I agree. I think, on reflection, and mulling over other people's reactions, the book needs a climactic horror-scene where the ghost confronts the arch-constructionist Snare. The novel may then proceed to its beautiful and beautifully written conclusion!

Anyway, it was a treat to read someone taking one of my books seriously, particularly the book where I attack strongly the literary establishment, which as usual has – apart from yourselves – studiously ignored my published advances into new territory.

Nigel Frith
Oxford

Dear Editors:

Congratulations on no. 74: two good stories in one issue! I refer of course to the brilliant, beautifully written "Ragthorn," and that chilling but only too believable peek into the near future, "The Welfare Man." I therefore forgive you for "Horse Meat." Keep this up and I may even forgive you for "Slowly Comes a Hungry People" which was a lot nastier than "Horse Meat," hasn't anybody noticed?

Kathryn Bell
London

Dear Editors:

It is easy to sympathize with your correspondent, David Alexander (IZ 75). A favourite magazine is part of the family, and it is easy to resent any changes or complacency. There can be no excuse for complacency, however: magazines, like everything else, must change or decay, and it is up to all concerned to see that the changes are for the better.

How should it change? It must grow. The present founder should continue his pioneering work and go on to become a publishing mogul. The current *Interzone* Science Fiction/Fantasy magazine should become two separate publications – SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY, each with ten stories so that readers don't feel short-changed.

The stories themselves should go to the limits of their particular genre – short shorts and long shorts (even series and serials), molecular and galactic, comedy and tragedy, reality and spirituality, dreams and imagination, technology and psychology, religion and philosophy, sociology and ideology... And what about bringing in a good old-fashioned editor who can cut down a verbose seven-page feature to column length without losing any of its essentials? Illustrations,

like the stories, should have variety – not conformity. Let us, over the year, see the styles of 100 different artists.

There is an obvious need for the organization to publish books as well as magazines, videos and tapes and other means of electronic publishing of the subject matter. Let's hope that the *Interzone* organization grows to be the recognized authority on Science Fiction throughout the world – and beyond!

A. Tyson
Chippenharn, Wilts

Dear Editors:

I have decided not to renew my subscription. This is sad because I enjoyed reading your magazine. Here is the reason.

One month you have an unacceptable story where women get screwed. Next you have a story where a gay man gets murdered. I like women. I am a gay man. You just lost a punter.

Of course you are entitled to publish anything you like. I hate censorship. I think, though, that I no longer want to have your magazine around. Its staff just don't appear to think.

Name supplied
Sudbury, Suffolk

Dear Editors:

As you might well be able to see from my subscription record, I've been a reader of *Interzone* for a very long time. I enjoy every story you publish, despite some of them making me angry and some making me feel ill (although, peculiar as it may seem to many readers, "Horse Meat" was not one of the latter). However, one thing really makes me both angry and ill, and that is the sort of letter which you print in virtually every issue, particularly from the "I-picked-up-my-first-copy-the-other-day-and-I-was-disgusted..." mob. It appears that you may publish anything you wish, as radical or controversial as you like, just as long as it conforms to the particular sort of "political correctness" (what an appalling cliché) to which your correspondents subscribe. I hope that you are never forced to comply with their kind of Thought Police ethos.

Dr Stewart Lloyd
Scawby, S. Humberside

Farewell and Thanks to Matthew

Matthew Dickens has now resigned as an assistant editor of *Interzone* due to pressure of other work. We wish him all the best.

MILLION

Some back-issue highlights:

No.1: James Ellroy interview (Paul McAuley); Kim Newman on gangsters; Stan Nicholls, Brian Stableford, Mark Morris & many others

No.2: Kurt Vonnegut interview (Colin Greenland); Joan Aiken, Sherlock Holmes, P.C. Wren; plus Wendy Bradley, Nick Lowe

No.3: Anne McCaffrey interview; Angus Wells, Fu Manchu; Stableford on Rider Haggard; plus John Christopher, Dave Langford & others

No.4: Ellis Peters interview (Mike Ashley); Andy Sawyer on Virginia Andrews; Stableford on James Hadley Chase; plus Langford, Byrne, & much more

No.5: Terry Pratchett, J.G. Ballard, Anne Rice & David Morrell interviews; Stableford on ERB (this is the same as *Interzone* no.51)

No.6: Dorothy Dunnett interview (Lisa Tuttle); Mary Higgins Clark, Thomas Harris; Stableford on Robinson Crusoe's children

No.7: Campbell Armstrong, Hammond Innes & Norman Mailer interviews; Mike Ashley on the *Strand* magazine; Stableford on Hank Janson

No.8: Stephen Gallagher & John Harvey interviews; Sawyer on "slaver" novels; Stableford on Hammett & Chandler; much more

No.9: Geoff Ryman interview (Newman); Doc Savage; historical mysteries; sequels & prequels; Hollywood novels; etc, etc.

No.10: Peter Lovesey on Leslie Charteris; Andrew Vachss & Jonathan Kellerman interviews; Elvis Presley; Rex Stout

No.11: Garry Kilworth on animal fantasy; Michael Crichton, James Herbert, Peter Tremayne; Andrews on Richard S. Prather

No.12: S.T. Joshi on Robert Aickman; series characters, Fay Weldon, Robert Graves, Rupert Bear; Langford, Nick Austin & many more

No.13: Clive Barker interview (Nicholls); Newman on Dracula; Joshi on Stephen King; Stableford on Shangri-La; Bradbury comics

No.14: Patricia Kennealy interview; Jack the Ripper, John D. MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers; Ian R. MacLeod on Gerald Seymour; & much more

All available from *Interzone* – see page 3.

WALT AND EMILY

PART ONE
BY
PAUL DI FILIPPO



On the morning of May 1, 1860, Miss Emily Dickinson, the epistolarally and ironically self-styled "Belle of Amherst," awoke feeling uncannily perturbed; so disconcerted by nocturnal phantoms and their ineffable residue of bewildered prescience, in fact, that, sliding quietly out of bed so as not to awaken Carlo, who yet snored canine-wise at the foot of the four-poster, she padded barefoot in her white gown across the rush matting of her flower-papered bedroom to her small cherry-wood table (its surface a mere 18 inches square, yet easily encompassing the Universe Entire) whereon she daily wrestled with her painful and ecstatic poems, and, pausing not even to sit, dashed off these lines:

*Dying! Dying in the night!
Won't somebody bring the light
So I can see which way to go
Into the everlasting snow?;*

upon the completion of which, feeling somewhat relieved yet still faintly palsied of soul, Emily crossed to the single window set in the western wall of her corner bedroom in the upper floor of The Homestead

(two southern windows looked out across Main Street) and, flinging back the shutters of the open window for a revivifying glimpse of her bee-ornamented garden and the nextdoor household known as The Evergreens, where dwelled her beloved brother Austin and his wife Sue, she was treated instead to the barely credible sight – which imprinted itself now and forever on her retinas like the last earthly patterns seen by a dying man – of a huge hairy bearded barbarian, utterly and shamelessly naked save for a black floppy wide-brimmed hat, giving himself a bath on her gem-bright grassy lawn.

Emily's heart filled with a mob of feelings no Inner Police could suppress.

The intruder had apparently taken no notice of the movement at the upper story of The Homestead he was so brashly profaning. He seemed utterly intent – in an almost devotional way – on laving his muscled and bulky form, using a cake of soap, a rag and the contents of the rain-barrel set immediately below Emily's window. His simple clothing piled beside him, his voyager's hat perched ludicrously atop his



his flowing grey-streaked locks, the stranger proceeded unconcernedly with his ablutions, as if he were alone in the midst of some Kansas prairie.

With his manly toes digging into the soil, he soaped his calves, he soaped his thighs – he soaped his reproductive organs! Emily blanched at the heretofore unrevealed sight of that manly portion, queer feelings thrilling every nerve. Reminding herself of her White Election, she raised her eyes with no little effort from that nether generative region.

The giant had moved on to scrub his masculine chest and arms, these latter plainly the well-formed thews of a labourer. Emily wondered if this could be some ignorant new hired man, employed by Father before his departure, who, having wandered from his quarters in their barn, now washed himself yokel-style in public...

All be-lathered, the giant paused now. He lifted his frothed arms up toward the new sun, as if in welcome to a brother. Then, shattering the matutinal stillness (and whatever remained of Emily's composure), he loudly declaimed, "Welcome is every organ and

attribute of me, and of every man hearty and clean! Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest!"

This wild unexpected outburst was too much for Emily. She sank to the windowsill in a half-swoon, the sudden fragrance of a few premature lilacs wafting to her and filling her nostrils with sweetness.

In so doing, she knocked over a basket perched on the ledge. Secured by a long string, it was the vehicle by which she dropped sweetmeats to the neighbourhood children on those days she felt incapable of leaving her room.

Emily watched the basket fall. It seemed to tumble down with unnatural slowness, taking an Awful Hushed Eternity to drop through the lambent spring atmosphere.

At last, however, it reached the end of its tether, bouncing several times with diminishing vigour, and Time resumed its wonted flow.

The madman's attention was at last caught. He turned and gazed upward, fixing Emily with his deep grey eyes, set beneath craggy brows. Doffing his hat

and bowing, he launched into a strangely metered utterance.

"Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore, 28 young men and all so friendly; 28 years of womanly life and all so lonesome. She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank, she hides handsome and richly drest at the blinds of the window. Which of the young men does she like the best? Ah, the homeliest of them is beautiful to her!"

Indignation replaced embarrassment in Emily. She straightened her back and summoned up her voice. "If you attempt some peculiar kind of poesy, sir, be advised that it is more effective when delivered by a clothed bard! And I'll have you know that my age is nigh unto 30, not 28!"

And with that Emily slammed the shutters on the naked man.

Trembling with rage and frustration, Emily rushed downstairs, her long auburn hair still sleep-dissolute.

In the kitchen, she found her younger sister Lavinia peeping through the dimity curtains at the bather, who was now rinsing himself heartily with buckets of water from the rain-barrel.

"Vinnie!"

Emily's sister jumped. "Emily! Have you seen him too?"

"Of course I have. How could I possibly have missed such a spectacle? My eyesight is bad, I confess, but not that poor. I only pray that Mother hasn't witnessed this horrid invasion. You know her health isn't up to snuff, and I can hardly imagine how she'd react. Vinnie, what are we to do? If only Father were here! One of us must run and fetch the sheriff, Vinnie, and I fear it must be you."

Lavinia regarded her sister with a look of disbelief. "Fetch the sheriff? Why, whatever for?"

Emily returned an equal measure of incredulity. "Is it not as plain as the spots on a tiger-lily? To arrest this jaybird-naked trespasser, of course!"

"Oh, I see. You're not aware then."

"Aware of what?"

"This gentleman and his party are guests of our brother. I assume that our Hercules has wandered over from The Evergreens, although why he should feel the need for such an exhibition, I cannot say."

From outside came the lusty chanting of the bather, along with the splashing of water. "I celebrate myself, and sing myself! And what I assume you shall assume. For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you!"

Emily shook her head. "Tish, what doggerel!" Returning her attention to her sister, she counterposed a question.

"Even granted his status as Austin's guest, why should we exempt him from the most basic laws of civility?"

Lavinia's eyes grew wide. "You really do not recognize who he is?"

"Should I have? He was hardly wearing any badges, nor could I see a *carte de visite* on his person."

"Oh, Emily, can't you ever be serious? Even a little housebound doormouse like you must have heard of the scandalous Walt Whitman and his *Leaves of Grass*. Why, the first edition was so shocking, Mister Whittier felt compelled to burn it! And rumour has it that the Boston firm of Thayer and Eldridge are to

publish a new edition this very year! That's one reason, I understand, why this 'son of Mannahatta,' as he styles himself, is visiting our New England. But there is another, more secret reason – or so Austin hints."

Emily fell weak-kneed into a ladderback chair. She hardly heard Vinnie's peroration. All she could think was:

At last, He has come.

Into the trundle-basket Emily laid the sweet dead children, row by row.

Foxgloves, turks-head lilies, pansies, columbines, the early rose. All her darlings fell to her merciless shears, weeping their glaucous tears.

I could not behead you, dears, if I doubted your assured Resurrection. But as children caper when they wake, merry that it is Morn, my flowers from a hundred cribs will peep, and prance again.

When her basket contained a sufficiency to hide what was at the bottom, Emily turned nervously to face her brother's house.

The Evergreens had been erected four years ago, a lavish wedding present from Emily's father to his only son (calculated, Emily frequently thought, to impress the town of Amherst with Edward Dickinson's stature as much as to house the newlyweds). The impressive white Italianate house with its boxy corner turret stood a mere hundred yards away, separated from the ancestral Dickinson Homestead by a small copse of birches, oaks and pines, linked by a narrow well-trodden path "just wide enough for two lovers abreast," as Emily had described it to her good friend Sue Gilbert, upon that selfsame friend's attainment of the sacred status of Mrs Austin Dickinson.

But at this moment – as at so many, many others – in terms of Emily's ability to reach it the house might have been situated halfway across the globe, midst the wastes depicted in the engraving "Arctic Night" hanging in The Homestead's parlour.

She did not know what flaw or affliction bound her so strongly to the confines of The Homestead, sometimes indeed forbidding her even to leave the cloister of her bedroom. The face of that cruel Master was always in impenetrable Shadow, strain as she might to glimpse it; though His Hand was always more than real, squeezing her heart with fear and self-loathing, should she try to run counter to its fluctuating dictates.

It had not always been so with her. Why, even as recently as five years ago, she had journeyed to Washington and Philadelphia, exulting in the freedom of travel. (Particularly stimulating had been her first encounter with an old family friend, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, and the many talks they had had on literature and art, continued now by correspondence.)

But as Emily had grown older, her Father – the dominant presence in the household – had grown less flexible, more demanding, harsher. (His religious spasm of a decade ago, during which he had bullied everyone except Emily into joining the First Church of Christ, had accentuated a certain Calvinism in him.) The Squire's iron rule of his quiet, insignificant invalid wife and his two daughters was positively Draconian, circumscribing all Emily's actions.

Still, Emily knew she could not place the blame for her reclusiveness totally on her Father. After all, Vinnie exhibited no such fear of society, and she too chafed under the Squire's reins. No, there was some congenital defect in Emily's own personality that made the prospect of venturing out among other people, dealing with their naked faces and needs, inherently impossible most of the time, however desperately and paradoxically she might feel the need for companionship.

Yet now here she was, out in the open, late in the afternoon of the day that had begun so oddly. (The egregiously hirsute Mister Whitman had dressed and departed some-where before Emily could con how to address him after her pert dismissal of his oratory. She prayed now that her hasty impudence would not foreclose further communication between them...)

Steeling herself to walk across those paltry 20 rods and into a house full of strangers, with bold plans to accost one in particular with the secret that resided beneath her flowers, Emily reminded herself: *If your Nerve deny you, go above your Nerve.*

Straining forward, willing confidence to arise, she teetered on her tiptoes, yearning toward The Evergreens. A sensation as of a hot bath tingled along her limbs. Her innards were molten. This was exactly how it had been three years ago, that December when the Sage of Concord, Mister Emerson, had visited The Evergreens, and she had longed to go to him, that noble personage out of a dream, but instead, oppressed by a certain slant of winter light, she had faltered and hung back.

Emily felt poised on the verge of a high precipice, volitionless to fall either backwards into safety, or forward into danger, without some kind of Motive Push.

And then it came.

From out of the primal greenery bordering the connecting path poked the enormous naked head of a strange bird.

Carried a full six feet above the ground, at the end of a long pliable neck, the sapient avian head examined Emily with quaint goggle-eyed curiosity for a timeless period. Then, giving a soft mooring call, the bird pulled its head back into the shrubs, followed by the sound of its retreat in the direction of The Evergreens.

The most triumphant Bird I ever knew or met embarked upon a twig today...

Emily set out after the apparition.

Halfway down the path, with yet no renewed sight of the fast-moving mysterious bird, Emily felt a sense of unreality sweep over her. Was it really possible that she was doing this? If Father had not been in Boston, speaking with the politicians of the Constitutional Union Party, who wanted him to run for Lieutenant Governor, she doubted that she could ever have braced herself for such a wild flight.

At last Emily emerged from the boskage and onto her brother's lawn.

And there was the glorious bird!

In the open, Emily could recognize the creature for what it was: an ostrich – from fabled Ophir, perhaps, yet still comically resembling a stilted feather-duster. No supernatural messenger, to be sure, but a strange sight nonetheless to encounter in placid, pedestrian Amherst.

At that moment a prepossessing young man, casually attired and roughly Emily's age, appeared from behind the house. Spotting the bird, he hailed it thusly: "Norma, you rascal, git back a-here, or tain't gonna be no supper for you!"

With unnatural alacrity, the big-footed bird hastened to obey the youth, trotting toward him with the zig-zag locomotion peculiar to its species. Soon, bird and man disappeared back around the house.

Simultaneously, the door of The Evergreens opened, framing Emily's brother within. His thatch of hair the same red as Emily's and his extravagant sidewhiskers had never looked more familiarly reassuring, though the unwonted expression of troubled distraction which he wore was less so.

Searching for the source of the ruckus, Austin's gaze fell on his sister. He moulded his features into a forced semblance of hospitality. "Why, Emily, what a pleasant surprise! Please, come in."

Now that she was fully committed to making her visit, however unwelcome it seemed to be, Emily found within herself the capacity to put some adamant in her limbs. She advanced with unfaltering steps across the lawn and into her brother's house.

Once inside, her brother tried to relieve her of her basket. "Sue will appreciate these blooms, sister. She's been feeling rather low since her return from Boston." A look of woeful gravity crossed Austin's countenance. "As have I, to tell truth."

Emily resisted Austin's gentle tug. "No, please, let me hold them a while longer. They comfort me." She was not prepared to show what lay beneath the blossoms yet, nor to just anyone. "But what is it that grieves you so? Does it have any connection with the guests Vinnie has told me you're entertaining?"

Austin closed his eyes and massaged his brow wearily. "Yes, in a roundabout way. Although I only fell in with these people accidentally, through my connection with the College. But they and their mission answer a need of mine, a need which has been growing apace this past year."

"Your words confuse me, Austin. What need do you speak of, that I know not? Since when have we kept secrets from one another, dear brother? Come, tell me what troubles you."

Austin opened his eyes and fixed his sister with an agonized gaze. "You would hear all, then? Very well, so be it. I have tried to spare you prior to this, but shall not refuse your direct offer of a sympathetic ear. But my story needs some privacy. Let us step into the study."

Somewhat daunted, Emily nevertheless followed Austin into the room whose shelves were lined with the lawbooks of his profession. Once they were seated, Austin pulled his chair close to Emily's, reached forward to clasp both her hands (*the sweaty palms of a fevered man*, she thought), and began his recitative.

"My problems, sister, concern relations between Sue and myself. No, please, let me speak plainly, before you interject a word on Sue's behalf. I know that you've ever been her partisan, Emily. Sometimes, in fact, I think we never would have married, were it not for your urgings. But that's of no consequence now. Married we are, and married we must stay. But you must know what connubial life has revealed to me of certain traits that were perhaps not fully

developed in Sue when you and she were girlish chums.

"Sue is a very ambitious woman these days. She desires to become the paramount hostess in all of Amherst. Not a very wide sphere, you might say, and you'd be right. Sue's ambitions do not stop there, I fear. She has grander dreams, to be enacted upon a larger stage – a stage which I am to provide somehow or another.

"Now, you know me, Emily, at least as well as I know myself. I'm not as driven as Father. I have no desire to venture beyond the pleasant ambit of Amherst as he has, representing the Commonwealth in Washington or parts more exotic. I'm basically a dreamy fellow, with a nature fully as poetic as yours. The fabled rushing blood of Grandfather Samuel has dwindled to a proportional trickle in my veins. Nothing would suit me better than a simple family existence conducted right here for the rest of my mortal days.

"But family life, you see, is just what Sue is dead-set against. She feels that children would be a drag on her social climbing."

Emily considered long and hard before venturing a comment. "I had wondered why the past four years had brought me no little niece or nephew. Father, too, speculates aloud why no heir has yet appeared. But I never expected that it was Sue's reluctance to consummate your union."

Austin laughed mirthlessly. "'Reluctance to consummate!' 'Tis far worse than that, dear sister! The union has been consummated more than once, as a result of certain ungovernable impulses upwelling from both our baser natures. And a year and a half ago, the natural result obtained. Sue became with child."

Emily faltered. "But, I never – Did she miscarry?"

"Far, far worse! She killed it!"

It was as if all the Heavens were a Bell, and Emily just an Ear. When she returned to herself, she struggled to utter the fatal word, but Austin mercifully preempted her.

"Yes, she journeyed to Boston in '59 for a – an abortion!"

"And this latest trip was for another!"

With this revelation, Austin burst into deep wracking sobs.

Emily cradled her brother in her arms, his violent sorrow washing away her lesser pangs, until he had cried himself dry. When he raised his face, it was stamped with inexpressible grief.

"The thought of that first death grew and grew in me, Emily, like a worm. When I learned of the second – although Sue begged to accompany me to the city on my latest trip, I never guessed her intention to repeat the evil deed, and she only divulged it upon our recent return – it nearly did me in. I cannot find it in me to put all the blame on Sue. Not only does she suffer terrible pangs from what she's done, but she's also only acting in accord with her own ideas of what's best for our life, horrible though her crimes may be. No, I account myself equally guilty with her, as much as if my hand had held the bloody instruments of infanticide! That is why, you see, I have taken up with these strangers. There is a Spiritualist among them –"

As if a Cloud that instant slit, and let the Fire through, it flashed like summer lightning upon Emily

what her brother intended. Somewhat disdainfully, she said, "You wish to speak to the souls of your unborn children, then, and seek some token of absolution, through the medium of this mystic personage..."

Austin fixed Emily with a wild, dire gaze. "Speak to them! If only it were that simple!"

"No, dear sister, we're going to visit them!"

The difference between Despair and Fear, thought Emily, is like the One between the instant of a Wreck and when the Wreck has been.

Her brother's uncanny words had indeed pushed her across the line separating those twinned emotions.

All her life, Death had loomed large in Emily's mind, an insurmountable wall she could only hurl herself against, falling back time and again with bruised mind and spirit.

Hers was not entirely a doctrinal Christian concept of Death; just as she could not bring herself ostentatiously to pronounce her faith aloud as the rest of her family had done, neither could she wholeheartedly subscribe to any church's tenets concerning the Great Clock-Stopper, although her philosophy partook of many schools.

Easer of cares, reward for a lifetime of pain and humiliation, cruel reiver of friends, coachman to Paradise, cheerful swain, whimsical thief – all these roles and more had that Inescapable Presence assumed in her fancies. Yet none, she knew, fully captured Death's real import. She had become ruefully reconciled to the fact that, try as she might to capture Death in her webs of words, its ultimate nature must forever remain a mystery.

And now here was her own brother telling her that he was embarked on a project to fathom that very mystery, to penetrate somehow into Death's Cold Kingdom – but in an insulting, materialistic fashion.

It was almost more than she could comprehend.

Sensing her bafflement, Austin spoke. "What do you know of the Spiritualist Movement, Emily?"

Proud contempt swelling in her bosom, Emily replied, "I know only this, having read plainly what was often writ between the lines in the penny press: that some twelve years ago, two young flibbertigibbet sisters – by name of Fox and dwelling then in Rochester, New York – decided to pull a prank on their parents – a prank which quickly grew into a farce beyond their wildest imaginings. By concealed rappings and other sleights, they insinuated that they were in contact with the so-called 'spirit world,' easily tricking their gullible mother and elder sibling, who quickly promoted herself to their manageress. From such an humble beginning, they've gone on to make their fortune by becoming regular stage charlatans, duping thousands of poor bereaved souls with simple tricks that were old when Cagliostro was born, and sparking the like ridiculous behaviour in millions across the globe."

Austin's red-eyed face showed a sombre mien. "You seem awfully sure of the Fox sisters' falsity and avarice, Emily, and by implication, that of all other mediums. I had thought that you of all people would be sympathetic to the opening of such a dialogue

between this world and the next. How can you be so certain there's nothing to their claims?"

"How could I feel otherwise, based on the puerile and ultramundane messages such 'mediums' transmit? Their source is obviously the hoaxer's own insipid imagination. Why, if I were to believe for one minute that the indescribable glory of the next world were to be found in such utterances as 'Mother, do not weep for your little boy, 'tis all peppermint sticks and licorice whips here on t'other side,' then I would have to – well, I do not know what I would have to do. Surely not kill myself, lest I wind up any sooner than necessary among these milk-and-water spirits!"

"I grant you, sister, that some of the, shall we say, less-inspired revelations of certain untalented individuals plainly betray a modicum of, ah, fabrication. But among the true mediums, invention is only employed when actual contact fades, mainly out of an honest desire not to disappoint the assembled seancegoers. In fact, the medium might not even be aware of the transition from genuine inspiration to unconscious generation of babble. But let us not quibble over the debatable duplicity of some hypothetical Chicago mountebank. Not only is the medium with whom I am involved authentic beyond reproach, but we also have the generous – nay, essential! – offices of a certain eminent scientist to put our whole expedition on an absolutely rigorous footing."

Emily stood up, knowing full well that she was allowing a look of disgust to disfigure those plain features of hers that could ill stand such an additional burden. But so angered with her brother was she, that she didn't care.

"It wouldn't impress me if you and your mysterious friends had a whole academy of bearded and be-gowned savants behind whatever bizarre scheme you're hatching! And you can chop whatever kind of specious logic you wish – I still maintain that any sort of Spiritualism is a load of bunkum!"

Austin permitted himself a small smile as he played his trump card. "And what if I told you that your beloved poetess, Mrs Elizabeth Barrett Browning, was a firm believer in the spirits and in their earthly partners?"

Emily sank back into her seat, shocked. Her dear Elizabeth – that noble Foreign Lady who had captivated Emily's soul in youth, whose poems had made the Dark feel beautiful and bred in her a Divine Insanity – the genius behind *Aurora Leigh*, – the heroic Female Poet whose given name Emily proudly bore as her own middle appellation – Could it indeed be true that such a superb mind could give any credence to this simplistic new faith sweeping the world?

Seeing Emily's doubt, Austin pressed forward with his case. "It's quite true. Mrs Browning's involvement with the spirit world began some five years ago, when she met the famous Daniel Dunglas Home. When she felt the phantom hands he caused to materialize, when the ghostly concertina played, when the spirits placed a laurel wreath upon her brow – then she knew the truth of the matter! Just as all doubters shall be convinced when I and the others journey to Summerland and back!"

Emily knew not what to think. First she had been overwhelmed with the hidden familial discord between her brother and Sue. Then her dogmatic

anti-Spiritualist stance had suffered a severe blow with the news that One so admired had been willingly ensnared in what Emily had heretofore taken to be the clearest kind of popular madness. Yet, she reminded herself, much Madness is divinest Sense to a discerning Eye, and much Sense the starkest Madness – 'tis the Majority in this, as All, prevail.

Her gaze falling on her basket of wilting flowers at her feet, Emily reminded herself of her real reason for visiting her brother's house. She was surely not advancing her hidden purposes by arguing with him, especially from a Foundation suddenly weakened. And as she did not intend to get involved with his grief-sired insanity, she could afford to let it slide.

"I'm sorry I made light of your new faith, Austin dearest. I realize now what drives you to embrace such a quest. Though I cannot bring myself to fully endorse such beliefs, I will reserve judgement on them, pending whatever new evidence you have for me."

Austin grabbed his sister's hands. "What a capital girl you are! I knew nothing could ever come between us!"

Picking up her basket, Emily said, "Perhaps you'd care to introduce me to these new friends of yours –?"

"Of course! We're using the back parlour as a kind of headquarters to plan our assault on the afterworld. We should find most of the party there. Come!"

As they walked through the big house, Austin explained how he had chanced to meet his houseguests.

"When Sue and I were in Boston, I saw a poster advertising a Spiritualist lecture and demonstration to be given at Mechanics' Hall. I attended, and the speech and exhibition so impressed me that I introduced myself afterwards to the lecturer and the medium who accompanied him. Learning of their audacious plans, and the imminent arrival of the scientist who was to assist them, I immediately enlisted as one of the party, offering all the help I could give."

"Does Sue have any interest in all this?"

"Not at all. In fact, she tends to avoid our guests, and rather resents their presence."

"I'm just as glad, for I do not know if I could bear to see her right now, so soon after learning of her sins."

"No need to fear that. She's been keeping mostly to her room."

They stood now in front of the closed parlour door. Murmurs penetrated, two male voices and a female. Emily thought that neither of the masculine ones sounded like Whitman's distinctive boom, and sought to learn more of him.

"You haven't yet told me what brings a famous – even infamous – poet into your home."

Austin smiled. "Ah, that was a curious accident. You see, Sue insisted that we pay a visit to Emerson, who was also in the city. I think she had some idea of getting him back to Amherst as her pet performing author again. When we were received by the old Sage at his hotel, we found Whitman with him. It turned out that Emerson was in something of a fix. He had volunteered to put Whitman up on his visit to Boston without first consulting his own wife, who, once she learned of it, absolutely refused to have such an 'immoral beast' in her home! Taking us aside, Emerson begged us to accommodate his friend at The Ever-

greens, and Sue readily consented, envisioning a social coup. Imagine her disgust, however, when the poet, learning of our Spiritual ambitions, cast his lot with us wholeheartedly!"

This last tidbit disturbed Emily, throwing doubt as it did on the poet's faculties, but she withheld her censure.

"I understand," continued Austin gleefully, "that you and Vinnie had a rather startling introduction to our unconventional Homer."

Emily felt herself blush. "You understand aright."

"With so many guests, there was a line for the bath this morning, and Whitman grew impatient. I told him he might avail himself of the facilities at The Homestead, but had no idea he would –"

At that moment the parlour door swung open.

A large buxom woman filled the doorframe. Draped with shawls, a flowing gypsy kerchief tied around her head, gaudy earrings and bracelets aglitter at lobe and wrist, she struck a dramatic pose, one arm thrust forward, the other pressed against her brow. Although well into middle age and not conventionally beautiful (a distinct moustache graced her upper lip), she exuded the same kind of animal magnetism Emily had frequently sensed emanating from the most sought-after ballroom belles.

"Madame felt the radiance of souls beyond the barrier," declaimed the medium, casting herself in the third person.

"Considering that we were speaking in normal conversational tones," said Emily, "to drag our souls in were rather superfluous."

The medium threw her arms down peevishly. "Faugh! Why do you bring such an unbeliever among us, cher Austin?"

"This is my sister, Emily. I wanted her to meet you. Emily, allow me to introduce Madame Hrose Selavy, Paris's most distinguished Spiritualist."

Madame Selavy's attitude immediately grew effusive, though Emily thought to detect a steely glint of remnant hostility in her eyes. "Such an adorable little creature, possessed of a wit fully equal to her esteemed brother's. Let me embrace you!"

Before Emily could protest, Madame Selavy clutched her in a smothering grip. She smelled of perspiration, wool and carnal musk.

Released, Emily reeled back. Before she could fully recover, Madame Selavy clutched her hand and dragged her into the parlour.

"Andrew! William! The much-spoken-of sister has arrived!"

Two men in their late youth – neither of whom was the ostrich herder Emily had seen – were seated at a table on which was spread an enormous chart, its upcurling corners weighted down with strange glass and metal contrivances looking like pronged vials sealed at both ends. A whale-oil lamp had been lit against the declining sun.

Jerking her hand out of the medium's grip, Emily sought to regain her composure. Austin allowed her some time by performing introductions.

"Emily, this gentleman is the author of *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind*, and the noted editor of a well-respected Spiritualist journal, *The Univercoelum*. In addition,

he is a clairvoyant in his own right. It was he who predicted the appearance of the Fox Sisters years before their debut. May I present Mister Andrew Jackson Davis."

Davis wore a barbered beard and tiny wire-rimmed spectacles, behind which dwelt disconcertingly unfocused blue eyes. He seemed unused to or removed from common social habits, and merely made a nod in Emily's direction.

"And this other open-minded gentleman, Emily, represents the scientific half of our balance. It's he who shall give our enterprise the intellectual solidity lacking in so many other ill-conceived ventures. I'm honoured to present not only the discoverer of thallium, but also a follower and friend of D.D. Home himself. Emily, meet one of England's finest intellects, William Crookes!"

The opposite of Davis, Crookes stepped forward with panache, took Emily's hand, bowed and kissed it. His long narrow face and high brow were not unhandsome. Speaking with a charming British accent, he said, "Your brother has slighted you, Miss Dickinson, for he failed to mention that your eyes were the colour of the finest sherry."

Emily was completely flustered, and found herself, for once, at a loss for words.

Luckily, Davis broke the awkward moment. "I don't mean to cut such a delightful interlude short, but may I remind everyone that we have much work ahead of us yet to do, before we're even out of the planning stages?"

Crookes relinquished Emily's hand with a wry smile. "Ah, yes. The spirit world, which has existed for countless centuries, cannot wait a single minute for us. Well, back to the grindstone, I fear. I look forward to seeing you again, Miss Dickinson."

Emily allowed Austin to escort her out of the parlour. As she brushed past Madame Selavy, she plainly heard the words "Little snip!" hissed in her ear, although Madame's lips appeared to remain fixed.

Out in the hall, Austin said, "It only remains for you to meet queer old Walt. He probably out with Henry and the birds."

Gathering her wits, Emily said, "Yes, I'd like that, if you please."

As they headed toward the rear door of The Evergreens, Austin said, "I don't think I mentioned Henry. He's Walt's travelling companion. Sutton, I believe. They used to work together on the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Young Sutton was a printer's devil while Walt was editor. Henry has been invaluable with the ostriches. He seems to have a knack for getting them to behave. Did I tell you about Andy's plans for the ostriches? No matter, you'll learn soon enough. Well, here we are!"

They had stepped outside. A newly erected pen dominated the backyard of The Evergreens. In this makeshift corral, six or more ostriches sat. Watching over them with soft clucking tones was the personable young man she had first seen.

"Hen!" called Austin. "Where's Walt?"

Before Henry could answer, a resonant voice came from behind them. "The green globe's favourite loafer stands firm right here."

Emily spun around with pounding heart.

Ever since Father had terminated her schooling at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary on the grounds of

"constitutional weakness" (in that same year the Fox Sisters were first emitting their rappings) Emily had longed for a renewal of the intellectual companionship and stimulation so fleetingly tasted. When, not long ago, she had begun seriously writing poetry, the need had grown even deeper, an ache that the dull and fusty correspondence with the Reverend Wadsworth could not appease.

And now, standing before her (clothed, thank God!) in full corporeal splendour, stood perhaps her first, last, only and best chance for such communion: a living, published poet.

Trembling, Emily thrust forward her basket of flowers. "My introduction, sir!"

Walt accepted the offering gently. She saw his keen eyes alight on the neatly stitched and ribbon-trussed leaflet of her poetry half-hidden at the bottom.

"Something more than it first appears, I think," said Walt, and winked.

Emboldened, Emily said, "My Basket contains Firmaments, sir!"

"But is it big enough, *ma femme*, to contain me?"

On the wall above the piano that stood on the flower-decorated Brussels carpet in The Homestead's front parlour hung an engraving called "The Stag at Bay." The noble venison – caught out in the open and surrounded by silently yapping dogs, the mounted hunter aiming his perpetually poised spear at its chest – was plainly ready to expire from sheer terror.

Precisely so had Emily felt, as soon as Whitman had uttered his veiled challenge regarding the capacity of her trundle.

A sweat had sprung out upon her forehead and her limbs had seemed not her own. The sky – the sky seemed to weigh so much, she was suddenly convinced that Heaven would break away and tumble Blue on her –

So she had fled.

Like a child affrighted by shadows, she had run from the backyard of The Evergreens, through the intervening copse, and into the shelter of her bedroom in The Homestead.

There she had stayed for the next two days, huddling beneath her quilts. Even Carlo had been excluded.

(And what of all further possible embarrassments should come upon her at the same time but her dreaded menses! That Doctor Duponco's French Golden Periodical Pills had somewhat alleviated the curse was small comfort. Where was the Pill she could take for her Nerves?)

Between bouts of self-chastisement and tears, Emily in her head had moulded a poem, that the period of pain be not entirely a loss.

A Wounded Deer – leaps highest –
I've heard the Hunter tell –
'Tis but the Ecstasy of death –
And then the Brake is still!

The Smitten Rock that gushes!
The trampled Steel that springs!
A Cheek is always redder
Just where the Hectic stings!

Mirth is the Mail of Anguish –
In which it Cautious Arm,



"EMILY SPUN AROUND WITH A POUNDING HEART"

*Lest anybody spy the blood
And "you're hurt" exclaim!*

She had intuited Whitman's allegory as soon as he had spoken. The double meanings which tripped so easily off her own tongue and pen still had the capacity to startle her when issuing unexpectedly from another.

Whitman had been proposing – nay, commanding! – a full and open relationship with her. It is not enough, he might as well have plainly said, that you give me these scribbled-over scraps of paper, expecting my opinion in return (valuing what you earlier slighted, in the light of my newly discovered fame). No, if you approach me, you must do so nakedly. You must deal with me as woman to man, as soul to soul, holding back nothing, if you would have the real juice of my fruits, the true meat of my tongue.

And this was just what Emily doubted she could do.

Although she longed to.

Only once had she opened herself up wholly to another. And look how that had turned out. Not that dear George had been at fault. There were few men who could stand up to Edward Dickinson's displeasure, and dreamy, intellectual George Gould – Emily's senior, Austin's friend and a crack student at Amherst – had not been one of them. When the Squire had discovered their innocent yet fervid affair and banished George, neither he nor Emily had found it in their power to protest, though both their futures were at stake.

And then had come Emily's self-imposed White Election: her Celestial Wedding, symbolized by her unchanging snowy attire, in place of the earthly one she swore she would never now know.

How, with such a trial behind her, could she find the strength to give to Whitman what he was obviously demanding?

No, it was impossible...

A peremptory knock sounded at Emily's door. Before she could reply, the door swung open. In stomped Lavinia, bearing a supper tray.

"I swear, Emily – you and Mother will be the death of me! Two bigger babies I've never seen! I've a good mind to marry and be shed of you both! Then we'd see how long this household would stay afloat!"

Emily sat up straight in bed, intrigued by her sister's indignation. "And who would you marry, Vinnie? Is there a potential suitor I should know about?"

"Humph! Don't you worry, I could scare up a husband if I put my mind to it. And I might just yet. Well, here's your supper. And mind you – no complaints that my Indian bread's not as fine as yours!"

Vinnie deposited the tray and turned to leave. At the door, she paused. "I don't suppose you're interested in news of Father?"

"Is he still in Boston?"

"Further away than that. Although the Party could not convince him to run this year, they prevailed upon him to help their Presidential candidate, John Bell. The Squire's on his way to Washington, and points south and west: There's no telling how long he'll be gone. And we should all be thankful for his absence. If he were here, and forced to witness what Austin and those loco cronies of his are up to, he'd be positively apoplectic! Why, the whole town's in an uproar as it is."

Emily's pain had almost driven from her mind Austin and his wild plans for a journey to the beyond. Now all the strange atmosphere at The Evergreens enveloped her again.

"What's Austin doing?"

Vinnie tilted her nose up and sniffed. "If you want to find out you'll have to get up. I'm not *Harper's Weekly*."

And with that, Emily's sister slammed the door.

Five minutes later, her supper uneaten, Emily was dressed and on the staircase.

At the rear entry, she hesitated. Could she really nerve herself up for another expedition to the mad menagerie her brother's home had become? What if that bestial Madame Selavy grabbed her again? What if the dapper Mister Crookes essayed another buss upon her hand? What if the fanatical eyes of Mister Davis transfixed her once more like a Butterfly upon a Card? What if she met Sue, her Lady Macbeth sister-in-law? What if she met Whitman! How she regretted now giving him her poems, those Keys to the Inner Chambers of her Heart...

Forcing herself to subdue all these jeering mental demons, Emily threw open the back door.

Heavy-blossomed clumps of lilac, white and purple both, flanked the portal, their sweet scent diffusing like a cloud around the stoop.

With his shaggy bare head buried deep within the drooping clusters, inhaling great bearlike snuffling draughts of their inebriating fragrance, stood Whitman.

Motionless, Emily froze and burned simultaneously. It was not Frost alone, for she felt Siroccos crawl upon her Flesh. But neither was it solely Fire, for her Marble feet could keep a Chancel cool.

Whitman withdrew his head from the flowers. Tiny perfect florets clung to his hair and beard, rendering him a veritable Pan. His open-necked workman's shirt revealed a pelt of chest hair – last noticed by Emily in a soapy state – similarly bedizened.

"When lilacs in the dooryard bloom," declaimed Whitman, "I exult with the ever-returning spring!"

Then, replacing atop his crown the floppy hat he had been holding, and gently taking Emily's hand, he said, "Come, *ma femme*, let us stroll a bit."

Helpless, Emily followed.

They meandered for a short time among the flower beds – the children so lovingly pampered by their mistress – without saying anything. Then Whitman spoke.

"Those were not merely poems you gave me. Not a book alone. Whoso touches them, touches a woman."

These words were more than Emily had ever hoped to hear in her lifetime. Willing herself not to faint, she conjured up an ingenuous question in reply. "You would say, then, that my poems are – alive?"

Whitman gestured widely, to take in the whole green scene through which they promenaded with hands so implausibly conjoined. Would any townsfolk, seeing her now, not think her the Belle of Amherst indeed?

"Is what you see before your eyes this minute not indisputably alive? Are you yourself not alive, the blood pulsing in you and the smoke of your own breath steaming forth? How could anything that

issues truly from one alive not itself be alive? Have no doubt! They live indeed! The divine afflatus surges through them as surely as it does through the song of a lonely thrush."

Emily felt her whole being filling with confidence and vitality. The constant anxiety that dwelt behind her breastbone began to diminish. But Whitman's next words brought her up short, deflating her new elation.

"And yet, like the sad piping of that lonely mateless bird, your poems exhibit a grave deficiency, a morbid strain that threatens to wrap itself around the living trunk of your songs like a clinging vine, until it brings the whole tree down."

Emily stiffened and tried to withdraw her hand, but Whitman would not permit it. She was forced to speak roughly while still in intimate contact with him. "I am not aware of any such grievous flaw as you adduce, sir. But of course, I await the instruction of one so *learned*."

Whitman took no offence at her cold tones, but smiled instead. "I am far from '*learned*,' Miss Dickinson, save in what I have gleaned from the streets of Brooklyn and the shores and paths of my native Paumanok. And as my purse and my reviews both well attest, I am no favourite of the academies! Yet my eyes are keen enough to find letters from God dropped everywhere. And what these old eyes – and my heart – tell me about your poetry is this: it is too cloistered, too rarefied, too much a product of the head and the hearth, as if you had no body, nor a world to walk in. You have that fine facility for '*seeing the world in a grain of sand*,' as Mister Blake would have it. But you seem unable to see the world as the self-sufficient miracle of *itself*! Everything must represent something ethereal to you. Sunsets, bees and rainbows – self-existent perfections which you insist on cloaking in your own fancies! Nothing can stand for itself alone, but you must bend it to represent a '*Truth*.' If you should continue on in this vein, you will, I predict, gradually refine yourself and your poetry entirely out of existence!"

Emily made no immediate reply. So sincere and vibrant had Whitman's voice been, that she was forced to consider the validity of his remarks.

Could it be possible that her constricted life – half chosen, half imposed – was really threatening her poetry with its limited scope? She had been so convinced till this moment that she had a clear vision of what was ultimately important. Were there marvels and wonders beyond her ken? Was she like a colour-blind person who thought she knew what colour was, but knew not...?

Haltingly, Emily tried to voice her apprehensions. "What you so glibly condemn, Mister Whitman, might indeed be so. Yet, what if my faults be as you itemize? They are part and parcel of my very nature, a crack that runs through me like the Liberty Bell's. And perhaps that very crack gives me my distinctive timbre. In any case, it is too late for me to change."

Whitman halted and turned to gaze deeply and sincerely into Emily's eyes. "You are absolutely wrong on that score, Miss Dickinson. I know whereof I speak. For all my early manhood, I moved in a fog of false feelings and shoddy dreams, only dimly sensing that I was missing my mark. It was only in my 37th

year that I awoke to my own true nature, and began to shape my songs. It is never too late to change and grow."

"For a man, perhaps, that may be true. Your sex is permitted to test yourself, to hurl yourself into clarifying situations that enlarge your spirit. But we women are not allowed such liberties. Bride, mother or sterile crone – these are the limited roles society grants us."

"There is an iota of generally accepted truth to what you say – as much as there is in the assertion that a common prostitute is not a queen!"

Emily gasped at the foul language! Whitman continued unabashed. "But I say that a common trull *is* a queen! And I say that a woman is not less than a man, and may do whatever she pleases! Listen to me, Emily!"

The sound of her own given name practically unhinged her. The smell of lilacs was in her blood like wine. "I – I don't know what to say. How can I venture out into the world? I've been hurt –"

"Do you think the dark patches have fallen on you alone? There have been times when the best I have done has seemed to me blank and suspicious. My great thoughts – as I supposed them – were they not in reality meagre? Nor is it you alone who knows what it is to be evil – if that is what troubles you. I am he who knows what it is to be evil! I've blabbed, blushed, resented, lied, stolen, grudged! I had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak. I was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant! The wolf, the snake, the hog were not wanting in me! But I contain them all! I do not repudiate the evil, I affirm it! My poems will produce just as much evil as they do good. But there was never any such thing as evil in this world!"

"Your words, Mister Whitman, contradict themselves –"

Whitman's face was scarlet. "Contradict myself! Very well, I contradict myself! I am large, I contain multitudes!"

Seeking to calm him, Emily said, "But you have not hit on my Deepest Wound, sir. It was – an affair of the Heart –"

Her words seemed to have the desired effect. Whitman grew calm and pensive. "There too I have sad experience. Miss Dickinson – Emily – if I share something private with you, may I ask a favour in return?"

"What?"

"Would you leave off this undesirable formality between us, and call me '*Walt*?' I know the difference in our ages traditionally demands such modes of address, but I abide by no such conventions."

Feeling the warmth stealing into her cheeks, Emily hung her head. "It seems a small enough thing –"

"Very well, then. Please, look –"

Emily lifted her eyes. She saw Whitman taking a small loosely bound homemade notebook (much like one of her own chapbooks) out of his pocket. He opened it to a centre page, then turned it toward her.

From the notebook stared a tintyped face, that of a handsome woman with dark ringlets, her hands clasped over the back of the chair in which she sidewise sat.

Whitman turned the book back toward himself. He kissed the picture, closed the leaves, then repocketed the precious keepsake.

Emily's heart was nigh to bursting. "Oh, Walt! Is she – is she dead?"

"Far worse! Married!"

Emily was scandalized, yet thrilled.

"We met when I was editor of the *New Orleans Crescent*. I espied her first at the Theatre d'Orleans, during a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Succumbing to the loose tropic influence of that southern port, we fell madly in love. Her electric body exhaled a divine nimbus that wrought a fierce attraction in me, and mine likewise to her. Many were our hours of joy.

"But she was a woman of high society, who could not afford the taint of scandal or divorce. It was the supreme wrenching for us when we realized that our love was doomed, and that we must part. She is the only woman I have ever cherished so grandly, or ever shall."

For some inexplicable reason, Emily grew slightly crestfallen at Whitman's closing sentence. But not enough to obscure the larger emotions in her bosom. The similarity of Walt's misfortune to Emily's own doomed affair placed a final seal on the affection that had been growing half-cloaked in her heart for the sturdy, grizzled poet.

Clutching Walt's big hand firmly with both of her small ones, Emily said, "You truly know my soul, then, Walt."

"Emily – I have considered you long before you were born."

They found a stone bench and sat for a while, side by side in silence.

But as the minutes passed, a small Fly Buzz irritant grew in Emily's mind, until she finally had to voice it.

"Walt – you used the word 'morbid' earlier in connection with my poems –"

"Yes, Emily, I did. For I fear that you are overly preoccupied with death."

Emily opened her mouth to protest, ready with a catalogue of Death's supreme importance in the scheme of things, but Walt held up a hand to stop her.

"I know all you are going to say, dear Emily. Rest assured that I too have thought long and hard on death. As glorious as it is to be born, I know it is fully as glorious to die. Were it not for death – and it is surely false to even speak of the two as separate – life itself would be meaningless. Yes, I have heard whispers of heavenly death all my life, in the voice of the waves upon the shore and the querulous call of sea-birds. But unlike you, I do not long for death, nor give it more than its due. I am too busy living, too busy indulging my holy senses, to lend death more than a passing nod. While you, dear Emily, seem more intent on hugging Death to you like a lover!"

Emily was incensed. "I holding onto death! Who's involved in this insane scheme of my brother's to penetrate the shadows of the afterlife? You, not I!"

Walt stood up. "You do not know the full scope of our expedition to Summerland, Emily. It is not an embrace of death, but a bold scientific assault on its territory, to wrest new knowledge that will benefit all the living."

Hoisting Emily bodily up with his bull-like strength, Walt said, "Come with me, and you shall see!"

The back parlour of The Evergreens had been converted to an impromptu classroom, or general's briefing post. A large slateboard rested on an artist's easel, sticks of chalk on its ledge; a lectern and a single capacious armchair stood beside it. Tacked to the wall behind the podium was the large chart Emily had seen flattened out on her earlier visit; resting prominently atop the lectern was one of the queer glass and metal devices which had been holding down the curious map.

Several ladderback chairs had been arrayed before the lectern. In them now sat five eager listeners, chafing slightly under a ten-minute wait: Emily, Walt and Henry Sutton three abreast in that order, with Austin Dickinson and the savant William Crookes behind them.

The whole scene forcefully reminded Emily of her brief schooldays. And inevitably with those precious memories surfaced the glorious figure of Leonard Humphrey.

Humphrey had been four years older than George Gould. As a child, Emily, through her Father's close connections with the college, had eagerly followed the news of the broad academic swath the bright personable young man had cut. He had seemed to represent to Emily the proudest hopes of a new generation.

Imagine her delight, then, when, upon his graduation in 1846, Humphrey had been appointed principal of Amherst Academy, the coeducational school which 16-year-old Emily and 13-year-old Vinnie attended.

Through the Academy's corridors the new principal strode like a veritable combination of Adonis and Socrates, captivating especially all tender feminine sensibilities, Emily's not excluded. (She had gone so far as to memorize Humphrey's valedictory speech, "The Morality of States.") To this day, Emily still regarded Humphrey as her first Tutor, and the memory of those few times when he had stood close beside her still had the power to thrill her.

Humphrey's unexpected and grim death in 1850, when he had appeared yet in the flower of his manhood, had been a Devastation to Emily and the whole town.

She did not know if it was the presence of another masculine Tutor now by her side, or the deathly topic of the scheduled lecture that made the image of Humphrey stand out almost palpably before her, as if straining soundlessly against the thin membrane separating him from the living. But so did he choose to manifest himself in her inner gaze.

I never lost as much but twice – thought Emily, when her musings were interrupted by the voice of the scientist behind her.

"The waste of time is the most damnable thing connected with working with these psychic types," said Crookes. "I had to contend with the same problem with Home. He'd produce the most remarkable effects – levitation, materializations, voices – but only after hours of boredom, the lot of us sitting in the dark with our sweaty hands linked. It's a bloody challenge to someone used to the bright light and clean-cut conditions of the laboratory, I tell you."

Austin chided his seatmate. "Can't you be a little more circumspect with your language, Bill? We've a lady present –"

Crookes snorted, not so much sneeringly as in admiration. "Me watch my language! Look who your sister's sitting next to, for Harry's sake! If she's read his doggerel, she's already received an earful. 'Pent-up aching rivers, man-balls and man-root' indeed! Why, he's got more gall than Rossetti and his whole gang of libertines put together!"

Emily felt herself blushing. She waited for Whitman to bridle at Crookes's speech, knowing how she herself would react to any attack on her verse. But the poet merely bent his sun-browned neck, smiled, and said rather cryptically, "I am surrounded by trippers and askers..."

Seeking to divert the subject, Emily turned boldly to face Crookes. "Why do you continue to pursue your unorthodox investigations under such trying circumstances, Mister Crookes?"

"Only because, Miss Dickinson, Spiritualism is the most exciting, far-reaching subject yet to fall under my attentions. Luckily, thanks to my father's fortune, I am permitted to indulge my curiosity in any fashion I choose, without worrying about earning a living. Otherwise, I'd still be stuck in bloody boring Oxford, as meteorological superintendent of the Radcliffe Observatory. As things stand, however, I'm enabled to travel the globe – and beyond, if we succeed – and to meet such charming young ladies as yourself."

Before Emily could respond, Henry Sutton spoke up. "Here they are."

From a side entrance emerged the awaited duo.

First to appear was Madame Selavy. Her clothing was somewhat dishevelled, one of her voluminous skirts rucked up to reveal an edge of her crinolines. Close behind her came A.J. Davis. The austere author and publicist for the Spiritualist cause appeared rather discombobulated, his vest misbuttoned, his glasses askew and his hair mussed.

Madame Selavy plopped down into the armchair set centrestage. She tugged her bodice up more securely beneath her overflowing bosom, then blew out a weary breath which, Emily noticed, distinctly fluttered her moustache.

Davis took up position behind the lectern. Seeming to realize his condition for the first time, he smoothed back his hair and straightened his spectacles before addressing the audience.

"Madame Selavy and I have been speaking to the spirits, in connection with our trip. The audience was an arduous and tumultuous one, as there was much interference along the Celestial Telegraph. Luckily, Madame's spirit guide, the Narragansett Indian Princess, Pink Cloud, was able to ward off all malign influences and deliver assurances of our success."

Madame Selavy interrupted. "*Oui, mes amis*, the auspices from Summerland are good. Soon, we shall be permitted to cross the border into the dominion of *le Moissonneur Hideux*."

For the third time now, Emily had heard mention of this unknown place called "Summerland." The name conjured up for her only one of those perfect July days she lived for, when she could feel a depth, an Azure, a perfume, transcending ecstasy. She resented the appropriation of the term by someone who was in all likelihood a charlatan who had succeeded in hoodwinking her brother, and resolved to speak up.

"Are you preparing to jump us over our beautiful

New England spring straight to the dogdays, Mister Davis? Or perhaps you are merely proposing a trip to warmer latitudes of this sphere? Popocatepetl or Teneriffe, perhaps?"

Davis stared hard enough at Emily to succeed in disconcerting her before he replied. "On the contrary, Miss Dickinson. Summerland is a realm more exotic and perilous, yet offering commensurately greater rewards, than any mortal corner of the globe. And we shall reach it by setting sail directly from Amherst – without, in a sense, even leaving your charming little town."

Walt turned to Emily. "Please, Emily, listen to him. This is no simple passage to India we are undertaking."

Davis removed his glasses, polished them, and replaced them. "Allow me, Miss Dickinson, to acquaint you with the history of our mission."

"I am a simple shoemaker's son, born into humble circumstances in Poughkeepsie, New York. In the year 1843, I underwent my first magnetic trance, and began to speak of things I could not possibly have known, due to my meagre formal education. Some kind believers saw fit to christen me the 'Seer of Poughkeepsie.' Since then, I have been in nearly constant contact with the spirits of earthly – yea, even unearthly – dead. Summerland is what they call their dwelling place."

"Summerland is not paradise, it appears, but rather a temporary stopping place on the way to God's kingdom, where the spirit may rest before making its final ascent. My discovery, as you can plainly see, provides the whole logic and rationale for spirit contact with our world. We are speaking not to perfected angels, but to recently disincarnate entities who have not quite thrown off their human concerns or shapes."

"The geography of Summerland – which I have managed at some pains to map – bears a resemblance to our common landscape." Davis picked up a cane pointer which had been concealed within the lectern and turned toward the map on the wall. Gesturing, he said, "Here, for instance, we see the Chrysoprase Mountains, which run parallel to the Tourmaline Sea. Beyond this range lie such features as the Bog of Effluent Humours, the Crystal Forest, the Beryl Palace and the Ten Silver Gates."

Emily meekly said, "What of the Paris Exposition?"

Her irreverence elicited chuckles from Walt, Sutton and Crookes. Austin, however, was not amused. "Emily – if you cannot control your tongue, you may leave. I will not have you disparaging my distinguished guests, nor the sacred quest we are about to embark on."

Hearing the hurt in her brother's voice, and feeling a renewed tenderness toward him and his grief, Emily made a motion as of buttoning her lip.

Satisfied with the reprimand, Davis resumed his speech.

"Ever since my discovery of this realm, it has been my one desire to visit it bodily, well before my death. I searched fruitlessly for many years for an entrance to Summerland. Just when I was on the point of abandoning my search, I met the illustrious Madame Selavy."

The medium spoke. "Ah, *mon cher*, it was *I* who met you!"

"As you wish, Madame. In any case, Madame Selavy represented a great advance over all other mediums I had encountered. Madame, you see, is able to act as a physical bridge between Summerland and Earth, by means of a curious new material she exudes.

"At this point, I believe I will let Professor Crookes take over. Professor?"

Crookes and Davis exchanged places. With Oxbridge schoolroom crispness, Crookes began to lecture.

"Madame Selavy is a portal between our world and Summerland. Extensive tests and trials have proven that she possesses the unique ability to serve as a channel for the very stuff of which the spirits and their world appears to be made. I have dubbed this new form of matter 'ideoplasm.'

"Ideoplasm seems to be a protean substance – partly organic, partly inorganic – heretofore unknown to science. Issuing from the body of our medium, it is susceptible to her thought commands, taking on whatever shape she wills. A hand, a limb, or an entire spirit can be made manifest. And these ideoplastic creations are quite tangible, as I can personally testify.

"Still, however tantalizing this new phenomenon first appeared to me, I could not see how it might offer us direct entrance into Summerland. The ideoplasm issued forth and returned through the channel of our medium, without permitting any mortal object to accompany it.

"This is where science stepped in."

Crookes now lifted the glassblower's product from the lectern and held it up for inspection. "This is my latest invention, which I modestly call a 'Crookes tube.' Through its evacuated interior an electric current can be made to flow, from the cathode at one end to the anode at the other.

"When this tube is filled with ideoplasm – captured and detached from Madame Selavy – and activated, a most startling thing happens. The tube and its contents, as well as any objects within a certain radius, disappear! It is as if, under the electric shock, the ideoplasm is forcibly ejected from our plane, dragging with it a certain amount of earthly detritus. The spirits have told us that they have seen the tubes and their wrack rematerialize in Summerland."

Crookes smiled smugly. "I will now restore the platform to Mister Davis."

When Davis stood again before them, he said, "Our world is in point-for-point contiguity with Summerland. Here in Amherst, for instance, your familiar grassy Common is, on the other side, coexistent with Summerland's Bay of Seven Souls. It is from here that we shall set sail for the afterlife!

"Even as we sit here, a wagon is on its way from the McKay Shipyards in East Boston, bearing a specially designed schooner. After our vessel arrives, we will fit it out with a circuit of ideoplastic Crookes tubes, which we have been filling slowly day by day. Thus outfitted, we will breach the barrier between the worlds, in a voyage more daring than Jason's!"

Out of respect for Austin's dementia, Emily had sat silently throughout this farrago of science and mysticism, despite her rising indignation. Now, however, she could no longer restrain herself. "And how, pray tell, does Madame 'exude' this celestial quince jelly?"

Davis assumed a flustered look and began to polish his lenses once more. Walt gazed toward the ceiling and young Sutton began insouciantly to whistle. Crookes crossed his legs and folded his arms across his chest. For half a minute, the room was as silent as a meeting of the Know-Nothings.

Then the medium herself spoke. "It is from the mamelles, dear sister of Austin. The bounteous tits."

To illustrate, Madame Selavy cupped her large breasts. "It is a kind of spiritual milk, which, with help, I can squeeze out, plip-plop."

Emily was speechless. The most obscene pictures filled her churning mind. *The Brain has Corridors surpassing those of the most haunted Abbey* –

Walt coughed, shattering her inner absorption. "Mad filaments and ungovernable shoots," said the poet, "play out of the female form, and our response is likewise ungovernable."

"Ungovernable," said Emily, "my foot!"

Lavinia Dickinson tied her bonnet beneath her chin, picked up a large lidded market basket, and, wearing a look of impatience, turned to her dawdling sister.

"Are you coming, or not, Miss White Moth?"

The use of her costume-inspired nickname roused Emily from her introspection. She had been considering one of the first poems she had ever written, the verse that began: *One Sister have I in our house, and one, a hedge away.*

How treacherous the one linked by marriage had revealed herself to be. A regular Cleopatra! If only Austin could have married sweet Mary Warner, how much better things might have been...

Emily thanked the Lord for the stolid common sense of her blood sister. She could not imagine life without her beloved Vinnie – sour, cynical, acquisitive as she was. How she needed her – especially now in the light of the unbelievable immorality which seemed to have taken hold at The Evergreens.

Three days had passed since the revelation about Madame Selavy's ideoplastic *poitrines* had caused Emily to beat a righteous retreat to The Homestead. (Curiously, she had not felt compelled to hie herself to the safety of her bed, but had instead frittered the time away in domestic pursuits; enough rye bread had been baked to feed all the gawping spectators at John Brown's hanging! If this represented an increased toughness of heart on her part, she knew not what to attribute it to, nor whether she liked it...)

In that interval, no one from The Evergreens had approached her to apologize or cajole. Save once, when Walt had knocked the very next day at the front door and been received by Vinnie.

"Give him this," had been Emily's response to his arrival, handing her sister a folded poem:

*A Burdock – clawed my Gown –
Not Burdock's – blame –
But mine –
Who went too near
The Burdock's Den!*

After reading it, Walt had departed wordlessly, and not returned.

Emily had felt a little surprised and saddened that the ocean-deep Bard had not pressed his cause harder. The fires of worship which he had aroused in her

– strictly those of one Poet and Free Thinker for another, she reminded herself; had he not admitted that his heart was forever betrothed to that nameless New Orleans hussy whose tintype he carried? – still burned, however banked their coals.

But for whatever reason, Walt had not pleaded or argued, and Emily had sought to put him and the whole insane menagerie at The Evergreens out of her thoughts.

Yet just this morning had come the incredible news from town which had reawakened all her curiosity about the mad expedition Austin and the others were planning, and which now threatened actually to make her pay a visit to the Amherst she had turned her back on years ago.

“Yes, Vinnie,” said Emily, rising from her seat and taking down her Merino Shawl from a peg and donning it. “I shall accompany you to town. That is, I think I can do so, if I may have the comfort of your sturdy arm.”

Vinnie seemed touched, and her gruff manner softened. “Why, that’s the least you may ask of me, Em. I know this isn’t easy for you, but I think it’ll do you good.”

“You are my Nurse and Confessor, Vinnie, so I shall place my faith in your words.”

Arm in arm, the sisters departed by the front door of The Homestead, descended the sloping brick walk, crossed the perimeter of low hedges, through the wooden gate, and turned east, down Main Street’s dusty unpaved sidewalk.

For a moment, Emily was reminded of the joyous sugaring expeditions her family and friends had once embarked on, before they had all grown so old and hard. Why couldn’t one remain young in spirit forever – ?

It was a short stroll into town – Amherst was not a big place – but Emily saw something to amaze her at every step. The simple village life – the children at play, the housewives at their chores, the carriages and horses, dogs and peddlers – It was all as miraculous to her as Heaven Itself.

With a pang, she heard again Walt’s admonition that she was refining herself out of existence by cutting the ties that bound her to a common, shared life...

Passing North Pleasant Street, both sisters cast a nostalgic glance at the house where they had spent a portion of their childhood. From its windows, Emily had watched numerous funeral processions wind their way to the nearby cemetery – her first conscious fascination with Death. Out of those sad and mean years when The Squire had been forced temporarily to vacate The Homestead, due to financial setbacks, she yet retained a few happy memories.

Emily wondered how her life might have been different had the family stayed closer to town, been less prosperous, not fortified itself in its castle, The Homestead. Would she have married, even moved away? It seemed so impossible now...

Ahead loomed the Common. Emily noted that most of the foot-traffic abroad this morn was tending toward that open parcel of land, and surmised that the rumours that had drawn her out were indeed true.

As Vinnie had predicted, renewing her acquaintance with the village was indeed proving a tonic. The gentle May breezes were having their old effect. Emily



“NESTLED IN STRAW...WERE DOZENS OF CROOKES TUBES”

could not meet the Spring unmoved. She felt the old desire, a Hurry with a lingering, mixed –

"Walk faster, Vinnie!"

"Not so speedily, Moth! Ladies do not run in public."

"I'm not a lady, I'm a Queen! And Queens may do as they please!"

Pulling her sister after her, Emily hastened toward the gathering crowd.

The Common was a rectangular expanse two or three acres in extent, fringed and spotted with May-bright trees. Several of Amherst's six churches fronted on the path-laced mall, as did those slightly disreputable yellow-painted structures known as Fraternity Row, among others. The hilly countryside surrounding Amherst held the public seat in its cupped hands, a natural amphitheatre, the mountains standing in Haze, the Valleys stopped below.

And now, as Emily could plainly see, the Common sported a new feature.

In the middle of the lawn, secured in its wheeled cradle by thick hawsers, 75 miles or more from the nearest harbour, stood a twin-masted schooner, looking as incongruous as trousers on a Sandwich Islander.

Surrounded by noisy spectators, the schooner resembled a misguided barque stranded on a shoal of flesh.

As Emily drew nearer, she espied the trim figure of Professor William Crookes standing on the deck. He was bent over a surveyor's instrument. Following the direction of its barrel, Emily saw Andrew Jackson Davis some yards away, holding a plumb bob.

Eight sweating Percherons in harness – no doubt the team that had transported the craft over the roads from East Boston – were still attached to the ship's undercarriage. At their head, holding a whip, stood Henry Sutton and his helper, Austin Dickinson.

Neither Walt nor Madame Selavy was anywhere to be seen. Emily suppressed an evil thought.

"We've got to move it 15 yards further on, Hen!" called out the savant now, above the exclamations and japes of the crowd.

Young Sutton cracked his whip in the air and urged the team on, aided by Austin. "Hee-yaw! Put yer backs into it, boys!"

Ponderously, the craft began to roll across the turf. At the proper moment, Crookes signalled with a chopping motion to disengage the team, and Sutton did so swiftly by knocking out a wooden pin in the linkage. The ship's inertia carried it on for a short distance before it ground to a halt.

"Perfect!" cried Crookes. "A tribute to Newton's Laws!" Abandoning his instrument, Crookes turned to address the crowd in his regal English manner.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of Amherst, you are privileged to witness today the dawn of a new era, an era in which regular travel between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead shall inaugurate a Golden Age of scientific theology. No longer will life be shadowed by death. Instead, a flourishing commerce between the two kingdoms will permit one and all to live without anxiety or fear, in the knowledge that our souls survive their earthly husks."

From the crowd a rough male voice yelled a flip-pant rejoinder. "Maybe you and your spooks can solve the Burdell murder!"

The reference to the scandal which had filled the New York papers a couple of years ago set off a gale of laughter. Crookes weathered it good-naturedly. When it had died out, he simply concluded, "You shall see more, and shortly. This much I promise. Then you may judge for yourselves."

With that, Crookes turned and clambered down a rope ladder, joining his three compatriots, who were planting chocks under the wheels of the schooner. The crowd, seeing that no more immediate entertainment was to be had, began to disperse.

Vinnie turned to Emily. The younger sister's face wore a mottled flush.

"Oh, Emily! I've never been so mortified in my life! Look at Austin, consorting with those mountebanks! How shall I ever attract a husband now!? Not to mention how Father is going to explode when he returns! There'll be hell to pay!"

Emily had never heard her sister swear before. It rather thrilled her. A kind of glorious exaltation had come upon Emily with Crookes's speech. All her life, Emily had secretly considered herself a rebel and even something of a thrill-seeker, though her thrills had been limited to the mental variety. "How I love danger!" she had written in her girlish diary. Now, with this fabulous and improbable ship sitting here like a slap in the face of placid, conservative Amherst, she felt as if her real life were just beginning.

Where was Walt, to share this excitement with her, and urge her on?

Tugging Emily's hand, Vinnie pleaded, "Please, let's go home..."

Emily disengaged from her sister. "You may scurry home if you wish, Vinnie. But I intend to see what else they're up to."

Vinnie appeared shocked. "But Emily –"

At that moment, a familiar resonant tenor thrilled Emily's ears.

"I think that only sailors, far from land, will ever truly appreciate my poems."

All around Emily, the whispering Leaves like Women interchanged Exclusive Confidences. And since Emily was a woman too, she could understand what they were saying.

He is true to you. He is here when you want him.

Her heart light as eiderdown, Emily turned about. Twice as big as life he stood, Walt Whitman, a kosmos, turbulent, fleshy, sensual, singer of himself.

The difference between remembering him and actually seeing him was like the Liquor in the Jug as opposed to the Liquor between the Lips.

Whitman beamed at the women, his bearded cheeks crinkling. "How good to see you abroad, Emily. And you too, Miss Lavinia. The very folds of both your clothes, your style as I watched you pass in the street, and, most especially, the contours of your shapes downwards inspired me deliriously."

Gawking, Vinnie opened her mouth, shut it, then opened it once more. "Well, I never – ! Emily, you can find your way home alone!"

And with that ejaculation, Emily's sister stalked off, swinging her market basket like a truncheon.

Walt was crestfallen. "I fear I have offended your sister. Please forgive me, Emily. It is something that happens all the time. I forget that not everyone is as spontaneous and free as Walt Whitman."

"Oh, don't believe her indignation for a minute, Walt. She was secretly pleased, I'm sure. It's just that she could not show so in public. I myself might have departed just so, a few days ago, in the mock affront demanded by propriety."

Walt laid an assuming hand on Emily's shoulder. "I sensed as soon as I saw you today that a change long underway in you was well-nigh complete. I am happy to have played a part in it, however small."

For once, Emily chose not to spoil her new confidence by analyzing it to pieces. She shifted closer to Walt so that his whole brawny arm slid naturally around her shoulders. Protected in his embrace, she felt even more assured.

"Let us go see what my brother and his cohorts are up to."

"Exactly where I was tending myself."

Walt and Emily walked up to the wheeled schooner. Under the shade of its elevated bow, Austin, Sutton, Davis and Crookes were prying the lid off a crate that had just been delivered by a local merchant and his wagon. Spotting the duo, the labourers paused. Sutton hailed Walt gleefully, and Austin glared suspiciously at his sister's compromising attitude. Davis and Crookes, after a brief nod, resumed their prying attack on the lid.

"What have we here, Hen?" asked Walt.

Grunting, Crookes answered for him. "It's the ideoplastic tubes. We've got to clamp them to their fixtures on the ship and wire them in circuit. Then we'll be prepared to set out. Perhaps as early as tomorrow."

With a creaking of wood and squealing of nails, the lid of the large box finally gave way. The men lowered it to the ground, and Emily peered curiously inside.

Nestled in straw, layer by layer, were dozens of Crookes tubes, each filled with a misty grey substance that swirled and coiled like a narrow Fellow in the Grass.

Emily's chest pinched with a tighter breathing, and a Zero at the Bone.

"Walt – I don't feel well. Can we go?"

Crookes evinced little sympathy for Emily's distress. "By all means, go. The four of us can manage quite easily to mount these electro-spiritual phials. Why don't you and the lady attend to the ostriches, Wally? That's more in your line, what with all your talk of loving the birds and baboons."

Walt seemingly took no offence at the half-veiled slight. "A splendid suggestion. Come, Emily – let us visit our feathered friends and study their wing'd purposes."

When they reached the edge of the Common, Emily felt better. She sought to explain what had come over her, not wishing Walt to think her a typical faint-hearted spinster.

"The sight of that slimy spiritual stuff affected me queerly, Walt. The notion that it all came out of the gross corporeal form of Madame Selavy – I fear it was too much for me."

"I recall that I too felt somewhat unnerved when I first witnessed a materialization. But such feelings pass, when you realize that nothing that happens on

this earth is unnatural. Everything is good in its place, and nothing is out of its place."

Walt's careless admission that he had witnessed an ideoplastic extrusion reawakened in Emily all the repugnance she had experienced upon first learning of Madame Selavy's promiscuous behaviour. Stiffening and stopping, she slipped out from Walt's embrace and turned to confront him.

"I suppose you don't think there's anything immoral then in helping to milk that trollop as if she were a prize Holstein! You've doubtlessly enjoyed such scandalous behaviour often enough yourself! Why, it's, it's – positively Mormon!"

Walt sighed, and, despite knowing herself in the right, Emily felt saddened to have hurt him. His patient smile that followed somewhat heartened her.

"Morality. I had hoped you were above such small conceptions, Emily. Is the sea moral, or the tree-toad? Is the running blackberry moral? Morality is the bane of small minds, to paraphrase my friend Emerson. I simply eat what is put on my plate, without recourse to praise or blame, thanks or curses. Life is much better lived in such a fashion. And as for our poor, much-hounded friends at Salt Lake – who can say that their way is not as good as – or better than – ours? It's more natural, at least. Does not a single stallion quicken many mares? But if it will put your mind at ease, I am happy to assure you that I myself have never materially participated in assisting Madame Selavy to, ah, form her ejectamenta. That task belongs to Davis and the professor."

Walt's words left Emily feeling both chagrined and relieved, embarrassed and reassured. She was glad that Walt had not participated intimately in the materializations; however, his cavalier attitude toward convention was hard to swallow for one who – however independent – had been reared all her life amongst the contaminating small minds of Amherst.

In the end, Emily let her predisposition toward Whitman have the ascendancy. He was a Poet, and such could not be judged by normal scales.

They resumed their walk, covering the distance back to The Evergreens in silence. Passing through the luxuriant grounds designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, they reached the ostrich pen. The enormous birds crowded to the fence to greet Whitman, who responded by petting them affectionately.

"I think I could turn and live with the animals," said the man, "they are so placid and self-contain'd. They do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. And above all, they do not make me sick discussing their duty to God!"

So neatly did these sentiments tally with Emily's own – she who had oft imagined herself a bee or spider – that she dropped a silent tear or two of joy. When she found her voice, she asked her companion, "I still do not understand what part these glorious fowls play in this expedition, Walt."

"You are aware that our motive power for breaching the dimensions comes from the miracle element, electricity – specifically, a set of Voltaic piles, are you not?"

"I am now."

"Well, the piles hold but a single charge – enough, perhaps, to send us to Summerland, but not to return. They must be continually recharged, by means of a treadmill-powered generator. The ostriches shall serve that purpose."

"But why such exotic draft animals? Surely a horse or two would have done as well..."

"It was instructions from Princess Pink Cloud, Madame's spirit guide. We were informed by the ghost that ostriches were the only animal psychically fitted to make the transition with us to the spirit domain. There is something especially ethereal about them."

"I can believe it," said Emily. "Just look at them!"

"They are beautiful, aren't they? I've named them all after the female cantatrices of my favourite operas, for some quality they possess reminds me of those primadonnas." Walt assumed an air of mock formality. "Miss Dickinson, may I present you to my ladies? Here is Donna Anna and Zerlina, Marguerite and Elsa, Lucia and Alisa, Barbarina, Violetta, Norma, Gilda and Maddalena."

Emily curtsied. "Charmed, I'm certain."

They both began to laugh then, Emily's titters gradually escalating to match Walt's roaring. They were forced to retreat to a seat which circled the bole of a large spreading elm until the shared fit of hilarity had passed.

When Emily could speak again, she said, "Walt, dear, I know why my brother and Davis and Crookes are participating in this expedition. But what are your motives? And what of your young companion, Henry?"

Walt coughed, then said, somewhat disingenuously, thought Emily, "Ah, Hen, he's a splendid lad. He's made much of himself, considering his orphan status and rough upbringing. I've known him since we worked on the *Eagle* together, lo, these ten years and more. Hen was a printer's devil while I was the editor, but we never let that come between us. We were always the best of friends. There is a rare degree of adhesiveness between us, and he is along simply because I value his company."

Emily recognized in Walt's mention of "adhesiveness" the phrenological term for masculine bonding. She could well credit the relationship, having seen the fond glances the two men exchanged. "That explains Henry's presence. But what of yours?"

Walt took Emily's hands, as he had during their first tête-à-tête. "Emily, what I am about to confess to you, I have told no others. They think I am along simply to gain general wisdom that will strengthen my poetry. After all, what poet worth his salt would refuse to embark on a voyage to probe the afterlife?"

Emily felt a pang, as if Walt were criticizing her own lack of enthusiasm for the expedition.

Oblivious, Walt continued, "And in a sense, that is not a lie. After all, I have a duty to make my songs as true and brave as I can. Our country, the glorious poem known as America, is entering a perilous period, Emily. I can sniff as much in every Southern breeze, if you take my meaning. And my songs must be strong, to help carry America through her times of trouble."

"But there is another, more personal reason for my wanting to visit Summerland."

"You see, I need to speak to my father."

Walt paused, and took a deep breath before resuming.

"My father died the very week my *Leaves of Grass* was first published. He never got a chance to see it, to see that I was making something of my life. He was a rough-hewn man, who measured success with his carpenter's level, and I was always something of a disappointment to him. Not to my blessed mother – no, she always had faith in her favourite son, and she yet lives and is pleased by my work. But my father – Well, suffice it to say that I feel that there is an unresolved matter between us, and that if only I could speak to him again, I would be able better to live my life and sing my songs. Do you understand, Emily?"

Now Emily was giddy, any slights forgotten. An ecstatic anguish raced through her veins. She should have known that Walt could have no ignoble motive for his involvement with the Poughkeepsie Seer and his entourage, no more than her brother did.

Throwing her arms around his neck, Emily exclaimed, "Oh, Walt! I who have never had a real mother or father I could love or turn to can sympathize with you better than anyone! Please, please, forgive me for ever being so impertinently curious!"

"It is not mine to forgive, nor is it even necessary. But I do."

Thrilled at his words and by his rough-hewn, sweaty, aromatic closeness, Emily shut her eyes and waited expectantly.

At that very moment she heard footsteps approaching. She and Walt hurriedly disengaged and stood up.

It was only young Sutton. "The professor says ter kindly wake up the gypsy, Walt. They're a-fixin' to have a say-ants tonight!"

To be concluded next month

Paul Di Filippo lives in Providence, Rhode Island, and has been a published writer for about 15 years. He has previously contributed two stories to *Interzone*: "World Wars III" (issue 55) and "Destroy All Brains!" (issue 56). He has also contributed copiously to the UK original anthology series edited by David Garnett, *Zenith* and *New Worlds*. His first book, *Steampunk*, is due to appear in America in 1994, and it will contain "Walt and Emily" along with two other novellas.

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There's an old superstition which holds that things come in threes, and it's one that offers some comfort as I sit down to write this brief essay. This is the third time in the last seven or eight years that I've agreed to introduce a book of artwork, you see (my previous lunges in this direction covered the work of Bernie Wrightson and the gargoyles which overlook downtown Manhattan), and that means that I may soon be able to put my art critic's hat back in the closet. I will be happy to do; it doesn't fit very well. There's a perfectly good reason for that. I reached the apogee of my own career as a visual artist in the first grade, doing stick-figure drawings of children jumping rope outside vast, crooked houses, and that fact makes me very uneasy about writing essays that concern themselves with art. I lack the unquestioning arrogance of the true critic, and am thus able to write with very little confidence about artistic areas in which I have absolutely no talent whatsoever. To write a negative analysis concerning somebody's work in such a field would be completely beyond me, but that is most definitely not the case here – J. K. Potter's best work may sometimes unsettle me, but it never leaves me feeling let down, presumed upon, or demeaned.

If the foregoing seems tentative (and who am I kidding? Of course it seems tentative), let me assure you that I do feel that I have at least some right to be here; imagination is one of the two or three great prime factors that seem to hold constant in all fields of artistic endeavour (along with such things as heightened sensory awareness and some innate sense of balance), and when it comes to imagination, I have an idea that J.K. (Jeff) Potter and I are soul brothers, and that my work calls to him in much the same way that his calls to me.

About five years ago, a new, computer-assisted film technique began to show up, first in television commercials, then in rock videos (which are, in my opinion, simply long television commercials), and finally in such feature films as *Terminator 2* and *Sleepwalkers*. This technique is called "morphing," and it is, *in one way*, simply a more sophisticated version of the old lap-dissolves and if you don't know what a lap-dissolve is, think back to the Universal movies with Lon Chaney Jr, where Lon would stare up at the full moon and gradually turn into a hairy creature with a long snout and big teeth. These lap-dissolves wowed audiences of the '30s and early '40s, and are still fairly effective today, but the discerning eye can nevertheless

On J.K. Potter: The Art of the Morph Stephen King



pick up the anomalies and minute changes, which not even a locked-down camera could prevent. Simply put, the eye may not know how the trick is being done, but it most assuredly knows that one is being done; that it isn't really Lon Chaney becoming a werewolf, but successive layers of make-up that are somehow being put on while the camera is stopped.

When you're watching a "morph," however, (when the tile floor in *T-2* turns into the bad guy, for instance), there are no anomalies or minute changes; the metamorphosis is created with a silent ease that stuns the eye and awes the brain. For a little while we are totally seduced into belief. That is why I have italicized the phrase *in one way* above – "morphing" is actually quite a lot more than just an ultra-sophisticated version of the lap-dissolve. Morph effects change the way we see, and the way we see affects the way we think and, to a much greater degree, the way we feel. When the so-called "blue-screen" replaced rear-screen projection in *Star Wars*, the effect on audiences was much greater than such a simple technological refinement would have seemed to warrant; the same can be said of morphing.

The point is this: J.K. Potter discovered morphing at least ten or fifteen years before Hollywood began to use the technique, and because his imagination has not been cosseted or chained down by a lot of brain-dead movie studio executives, he has been able to create the gallery of extraordinary images you will see here. As I write this, I am looking at a picture titled "Palmetto Thoughts". At first glance it appears to be a much less exotic bloom than the sort of "morph" effects I've been talking about; it looks, in fact, like your common-or-garden-style double exposure: a pensive young woman in a striped shirt on top, with a ghostly intaglio of palmetto leaves beneath. Then you look a little closer and realize that what you first took for the young woman's hair isn't hair at all but a palmetto tangle that looks like some strange and creepy forest of reaching, supplicating arms. The pensive young woman is thinking so hard about palmettos that she is apparently turning into palmettos; she is, in fact, "morphing".

You will discover your own favourite images in this rogue's gallery (except "favourite" hardly seems to be the right word when thinking about the pensive young woman with the palmetto forest growing out of her head, or "News

from the Sun", in which the Desolation Row disco dancer's features have been replaced by what appears to be the face of a Westclox alarm clock), but I suspect that your overwhelming sensations will be shock and dismay. Many of Potter's images actually assault the eye, and of course this is the artist's intention. These images of bodies in revolt, machines in strange and uneasy alliances with flesh, technology erupting from nature like a skeleton from a fume of decaying flesh, are the work of a practising anarchist. You will find strange, satiric riffs (a grackle growing out of the head of a woman who appears to be a fashion model), disturbing eroticism ("Catwoman", "The New Flesh"), and even images of pure and wistful fantasy ("The Garden of Time", "Valsin"). Above all, you will again and again find the transpositions of a mind that is capable of making bizarre and exhilarating connections. What makes these transpositions so powerful is their photographic reality. Photography has become one of the mundane constants of our world; we are surrounded by a blizzard of photographic images each and every day. Rather than fighting this, Potter has given into it, allowing transposition, overlays, airbrush techniques – and his own gonzo imagination, of course – to do the rest.

Okay, that's enough rambling; let's cut to the chase. I don't know how he has achieved this remarkable range of effects, and I don't really care, any more than I care about how the special effects in my favourite movies were done. The truth about pulling a rabbit out of a hat is that no one, except perhaps aspiring magicians, really wants to know how the trick was accomplished; the rest of us just want to gasp... and then applaud like mad. Which, in case you didn't realize, is what I'm doing in this brief introductory essay.

We perceive our lives on certain well-defined tracks, which run through the dark and well-nigh endless forest of experience; we see what our parents and teachers taught us to see, and little more. It is the job of the artist to barricade one or more of those tracks and shunt us off in some new direction – either on a new, heretofore untravelled path, or into the heart of the forest. These barricades are usually pretty flimsy; for all the imaginative artist's efforts, almost any barrel-chested, right-thinking Republican can knock them over and go marching sturdily down the well-known and well-travelled path without so



much as a single look back. It is this sort of mind, the sort of mind that cannot conceive of departing from the familiar path (or condone people who have a more adventuresome spirit), which will feel most offended by a piece of work such as "Eyeteeth", if it is forced to first see



and then think about it. That the young woman's left eyelids have become eyelips. It's a kind of depth-charge, one that doesn't explode for quite some time after it's been dropped. It breaks the track of perception with sneaky suddenness, and – this may be at the heart of Potter's strange genius, so listen up – once it has been seen, it cannot be unseen. You're forced to cope with the image of that woman with the teeth in her eyesocket. You may not like it, but for better or worse you have to cope with it.

So this is absolutely not a book for conventional minds. Those conventional minds that do encounter it (and there are always a few) will probably be sickened and outraged by it; reactions that will no doubt please a gleeful anarchist such as J. K. Potter to no end. He is, after all, a shockwave rider, as much a splatterpunk as any of the writers whose work he has illuminated and – in some cases – outshone. Does this make him amoral or outright immoral? I suppose there are more than a few Babbits out there, fellows who believe American art really peaked with N.C. Wyeth's illustrations for *Treasure Island* and Norman Rockwell's Thanksgiving and Christmas-cover paintings for *The Saturday Evening Post*, who would say it does. They are wrong. J.K. Potter has spread the freak-tent of the new flesh not just to make us quiver with revulsion but to examine what that quiver may mean. These strange techno-gaslight portraits of *le monde noir* are Potter's effort to break the track of perception, to shunt us off into the darker ravines where the monsters wait. Why does he want us to go there? Three reasons, I suspect. First, because he guesses that there are a few palmetto thoughts in all of us. Second, because he probably guesses that those monsters – the woman with the bird coming out of her head, the man with the piranha teeth growing out of his jaw – are really just versions of ourselves. Third, and most important, because he can... and because he has to.

Oh, look here – we seem to have come to a barricade across the path. One could push it over and stride on, I suppose, but I urge you not to. If we step into the shadow of yon trees, we may enter a new world, one full of sights we have never seen before.

Shall we?

Take my arm – I'll go with you.

Stephen King

The above piece will appear in J.K. Potter's book *Horripilations*, to be published in November 1993 by Dragon's World Ltd. at £12.95.

Special Effects

Cherry Wilder

During a cease-fire in the Causality War a Grandmother and two grads from one of the equivalent companies took shelter for the night in a derelict chapel. They had promised themselves, as a treat, to spend the afternoon, evening, night and morning, in just that order, in a pension or a bed and breakfast. Then Keith, the tall grad, saw the modest steeple rising from a tangle of green in the corner of a large industrial complex.

A new plant with rakish black gables and louvred windows faced a main road. Behind it lay a wasteland of crumbling brick and stone, netted with brown grass; there were storage tanks, twisted heaps of old pipeline. The green corner with the old chapel was divided from the rest of the compound by a weedy ditch and a few sections of old wooden garden fencing. There was nothing to indicate, not even to Gran Phillips and her unit, why the trees and vines were growing so green. Petra, the senior grad, gazed up at the steeple, surmounted by a cross, surmounted by a magpie, as if pondering a first cause.

"Perhaps the whole place should be green," she said.

"I wonder about their ground water," said Gran Phillips.

"Isn't that a fountain?" asked Keith.

They found their way to a patch of dusty, down-trodden grass before the main door of the chapel. The stone arch was gothic, but the door itself was of peeling painted wood, loosely fastened with a chain. Gran Phillips noticed that the exterior stonework was patchy with large areas of 19th-century restoration work in brick. Keith's fountain, in a direct line with the doorway, consisted of a stone spout and a stone basin, both very old indeed. The basin was full of leaf mould and a few scraps of paper and pull-tabs. There was a newish wooden seat nearby and a big black trash bin with stickers on it which said *Aktion Bonifatius!* and *Save the St Boniface Chapel*.

"Look at this," said Petra.

Off to one side a rough circle of knotty black projections could just be seen rising out of the grass. The three of them stared for a moment then instinctively raised their heads to the sky, looking for something that had loomed its last.

"Oak, probably," said Gran. "The oak and the spring. People have been coming here for a long time."

She peered into the chapel through the loosely fastened door.

"I think we'll try the side entrance," she said. "Off you go, Keith."

He led the way along a well-worn brick path through lush tangles of morning glory hanging from the trees. Petra beckoned the supply trolley. Gran Phillips, who had once fancied herself a bit of a Nose, inhaled cautiously. The place reeked of wet leaves, wet grass, wet apple tree; whiff of dead mole, soupçon of fennel, base note of very old, black earth. A side door stood open; in they went.

The chapel was an empty shell, stripped down to its dusty plaster walls. It looked much larger inside than out: the roof was of late mediaeval construction with heavy blackened beams. There were no traces of the original interior; even Gran took a few seconds to get oriented.

She saw that near the place where the altar must have been some people were having a meeting. They had brought along folding chairs and a picnic table for bottles of mineral water plus the secretary's lap-top. Perhaps it had been a larger meeting at first but there were only three people left. The unit could not see the people very clearly because the air inside the chapel was crowded with shadows, sunmotes and fugitive particles. One thing was certain: the three people at the meeting could not see *them* at all. The Korosov Occultation was working perfectly.

There was only one place which looked reasonably cosy for an overnight bivouac, and this was an area of good stone flooring in the southwestern corner, near the steps to the gallery.

"Over yonder!" she ordered.

They struck off across the dusty floor. Coloured lights flashed from the tall windows: behind the clumsy coverings of wallboard there were still some remaining fragments of stained glass. Petra led the trolley round the edge of a gaping pit.

"Would they have a crypt?" asked Keith.

"Doubt if it's occupied," said Gran.

"What's the meeting about?" he asked.

"Saving the chapel," said Petra. "Preservation of Monuments. That's my guess anyway."

"We passed an information rack as we came in," said Gran Phillips. "Hold on. Don't deploy for a second."

She strolled back to the door and collected a selection of info sheets from the rack. She had barely scanned the first two leaflets which were headed respectively *Aktion Bonifatius!* and *Finger weg von der*

Kapelle-im-Grünen! when her senses, sharpened by child-rearing, bird-watching, lab work, video games and selected drugs, gave warning of an irregularity. Instinctively she moved 60 centimetres to the right. She saw a dark, wavering line, a line of black light that cleft the dusty floor of the chapel.

Gran Phillips did not dare take out her recording device; she stared fixedly at the line throughout its course, committing it to memory. Due south from this side doorway, then wavering along the edge of the pit. The light widened into a dark fissure as it climbed a low pile of brick and stone at the pit's edge. She saw that it crossed the nave, glittering like water, beyond the stones, then pressed on towards the southern wall. It was lost to her view in a shallow embrasure between two windows.

She sniffed the air, stripped off her gloves and rolled up the sleeves of her blouson. She caught the distinctive odour of ozone and felt the tingling of the flesh that she had once or twice experienced under laboratory conditions. She wiggled her jawbone, and Petra came in over the intercom:

"Gran?"

"Triple alert!" whispered Gran Phillips. "We have a magic casement!"

"You mean a combat obstacle?" asked Petra.

"Who's breaking the bloody truce?" cut in Keith. "Those clowns from Camlabs? The madwomen from Humboldt-Free? Some Wild No-Talents from UMass?"

"Quiet!" ordered Gran. "Take your allergy capsules, Keith. The ozone count is high. We have an unmapped disjunction."

She gave the readings.

"Oh, Gran..." Petra said softly. "What a beauty!"

Gran rejoined her unit with care, carrying handfuls of info sheets. She noticed the behaviour of the black line as she skirted it, heading for their corner. Very slight seismic reactions to her light step. More disquieting was the behaviour of one member of the committee, far away to the east. A dark-haired woman of about 50, conservatively dressed, rose up from her place at the picnic table and stared, transfixed, at the place by the side door where Gran Phillips had been standing. She had caught a glimpse of something: perhaps a trace of Gran herself, perhaps a sending from elsewhere, something that had slipped through the casement.

"It's spooky!" said Keith. "How could she see you? Is she a materializing schizoid like Joan of Arc?"

"Joan of Arc would have had some fun in *this* chapel!" said Gran. "The woman has strong psi. She always feels vibrations here. Now Petra, what's the gist of all this data? Where are we anyway...in Thuringia or in Hessen?"

"The area that students refer to as the Hessian Congo," observed Petra, who had studied at Johann Wolfgang von Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. "About a hundred kilometres from the Thuringian border."

"This is the last meeting, I think," said Keith. "They're going to tear down the chapel on Monday morning. It says here..."

"Little do the charlies know," said Gran Phillips, who went back a long way, media-wise.

They allowed the trolley to set out their own folding chairs and settled down to study the information

sheets and the copy of a small local newspaper.

"Aha!" said Gran. "We have a curious situation here. Get a load of the man in the Boss sports coat. He's not only the Company hitman, he is Wolf-Dietrich von Eiben, sole owner of the land."

She chuckled.

"One of the reasons the chapel is going is that the fabric isn't old enough. It was restored in 1893, by Wolf-Dietrich's great-great-grandmother, an eccentric old noblewoman who said she'd been given instructions by the angels."

"That girl in the Robin Wood T-shirt is Katja Vogel, ex-member of the state parliament, a Green fundamentalist," said Petra. "She organized demonstrations, sit-ins, and so on to save the Chapel-in-the-Green."

"Mmm," said Keith approvingly. "She's quite nice. Why is bloody old Wolf-Dietrich so determined to tear the place down?"

"As far as I can make out, he *claims* that it's simply the need to expand, provide more jobs, make more roofing components," said Gran.

"Rumours of graft, bribery, tax-dodging," said Petra. "Wolf-Dietrich has been nicknamed *der Raubritter*, roughly speaking 'the Robber Baron'."

"Our psi lady is Frau Steiger, widow of a Protestant minister and member of the local Archaeological Society," said Gran.

"What's the next move?" asked Keith.

"Go round to the west door again, Petra," said Gran Phillips, "and do a quick scan. Check the ground water, especially near the old spring."

"*Jawohl!*" said Petra.

"Keith, you must take a walk on the real side. Put on your 'Save the Whales' T-shirt and crash the meeting. Carry current identification and your press pass from 'London Underground'. Just play it by ear and work in anything I send you on the vibrovine."

"What if those people go charging into the disjunction area?" asked Keith. "Am I supposed to head them off?"

"Only if you can do it naturally," said Gran.

"What will you be doing, Gran?" asked Petra.

"Oh, I'll just take a look at our magic casement," said Gran nonchalantly. "Remember the one in Ballnochie?"

"You mean the Loch Rae disaster?" said Petra. "Oh Gran, do be careful! Someone was *lost* there, someone *crossed over*..."

"Professor McBride. Poor old Archie. He would go down to the water's edge," said Gran Phillips. "Mind you, we got various specimens back. In return, as it were."

"You're being very callous, Grandmother!" said Keith. "This poor old man, this Prof, disappeared without trace? Wasn't there a terrible fuss?"

"Well, Keith," said Gran reasonably, "he was a tough old bastard who knew the district well, back as far as the Cambrian. He also had a good knowledge of comparative Gaelic."

They blamed the Scottish Nationalists," said Petra, "and the CIA."

"What did you get back?" asked Keith, smoothing down his 'Save the Whales' T-shirt.

"That'd be telling, wouldn't it!" said Gran slyly. "Actually, we had to put down the plesiosaur, the

lake was too small for it. The little boy is still doing well, and his boat is in the local museum."

With a gleam in her eye she accepted a paper funnel from the trolley. She unfurled a long, brown cloak of imitation wool frieze and swung it across her shoulders. She put up her hood and checked her screening.

Melanie Steiger rose to her feet and uttered a muffled scream. Katja cried out: "What is it? Is it another rat? For God's sake, Frau Steiger!"

Herr von Eiben paused resentfully at the interruption. He had been reading them the geologists' report in a voice tinged with regret. He hated jittery females who saw things. He saw things himself, in his mind's eye: policemen, lawyers, bailiffs, rows of judges, wearing black or even red robes and flat caps.

"I saw someone!" said Frau Steiger.

She had meant to apologize for making a fuss, but this apparition had given her courage.

"You really have no need to read the whole document," she said bitterly. "We know what's in it. We know...how it was obtained!"

Herr von Eiben gulped mineral water and directed the baleful force of his personality at the wretched woman. "What did you see, Frau Steiger? Please inform us. Put it into the minutes."

Frau Steiger pressed her lips together, typed rapidly on the lap-top for a few seconds, then read back:

"At this point during the reading of the so-called experts' report I saw a dark figure in a hood moving about near the gallery of the St Boniface Chapel!"

"You've been on the verge of coming out with this esoteric nonsense all through the negotiations," he said harshly. "Now the best you can do is the figure of a monk. Or was it a nun?"

"Don't take that tone!" snapped Katja. "Frau Steiger told us what she saw. This is an historic building on an ancient site, a green oasis in the filthy chaos of modern industrial society, and you want to destroy it!"

"Typical subversive Green shit!" said Wolf-Dietrich. "Sort of insolence you've been coming out with all along. Get it into your bird-brain, Fräulein Vogel, it's all over. You've had your self-serving little demo. This site will be cleared! To hell with this quatsch about historic monuments, hidden springs, ancient cult places..."

"Hey, may I quote that?"

This time everyone gave a start; Frau Steiger squeaked again. No one had heard the young man on the path. Now he was leaning in through an uncovered window, filming away with his nifty little camcorder. Before they had recovered, he vaulted through the opening and strolled over to the table. He was tall and rangy; Katja noticed his T-shirt.

"Lake," he said. "Keith Lake from 'London Underground'. Could Herr von Eiben spare us a few minutes...?"

His German was passable, his accent more or less English.

"Impossible!" snapped Wolf-Dietrich. "There's nothing more to be said here. I have to go to the airport."

He shot his cuffs and glanced at his Patek watch.

Frau Steiger made a quick entry on her keyboard and cried out:

"That cannot be! Herr von Eiben, you're not leaving! You know that there will be a final offer made..."

"And a last-minute stay of proceedings, if we can manage it..." chimed in Katja.

"Get away from me with that damned thing!" shouted Wolf-Dietrich. "Stop filming! I simply don't want to be interviewed. Did I say I was leaving?"

"Herr von Eiben," said Keith, "very recent reports show that there is still a spring close to this chapel..."

"I knew it!" cried Katja. "So much for your lousy 'Experts' Reports'!"

"Out!"

Wolf-Dietrich jerked his head at Keith and began packing documents into his briefcase. Frau Steiger said timidly:

"We could go outside..."

"Good idea," said Keith.

He followed the two women to the side door, and they all stepped out into the green shade.

Wolf-Dietrich was glad to be alone. He was assailed by doubts about the wretched reports. A spring? Could those stupid, venial old idiots have lied about a spring of water? After he had stressed the delicacy of the transaction and doubled their fee?

He strode towards the excavation site, gazing up at the beams overhead, taking in the whole ambience of the place. Almost for the first time he realized that it would be a damned shame to tear down the old ruin. Surely his first duty to the family, the firm, to all his nearest and dearest, was to stay out of jail, avoid bankruptcy as long as possible? The notion of making a run for it occurred to him. At the same moment he sneezed violently, noticed the whiff of ozone; there seemed to be a patch of watery black shadow in his path. He could have sworn that something moved, high up in the embrasure on the south wall...in a moment he would be seeing things, like that old goat Melanie Steiger.

In fact his first altered perception was not visual. He felt that he had stepped into a patch of damp grass. He glanced down, then up again, and stood rooted to the spot. A dark convulsion passed through the Bonifatius-Kapelle. A mighty *Gestalt* was just beginning to take shape in the embrasure: he could see the trunk forming, then the branches. It reared up and changed the world. Wolf-Dietrich found that he could move, he wrenched his feet out of the muddy grass and ran shouting towards the great oak tree that arched far over his head into the evening sky.

He caught his foot in a hole, perhaps a rabbit burrow, and measured his length on the rough grass and bracken fern that grew up to the tree's roots. There was no answer to his shout, but he began to hear natural sounds, rustlings in the undergrowth, a late bird singing. There was a steady plashing of water: he turned his head and saw the spring bubbling up in some kind of stone basin. For a moment the rustic scene wavered, behind the spring he caught a shadowy trace of brickwork, the fragment of an arch. Was it the crypt of the chapel?

He heaved himself up and plunged towards the spring. A voice said crisply: "Stay where you are! The fissure is already closing!"

Wolf-Dietrich stood still, panting, and wiped

muddy hands on his 500 DM beige flannel trousers. He got out a few words: "Where... where am I?"

He had only the vaguest notion where the old woman must be standing.

"You've fallen through a disjunction between two versions of Earth," said the voice. "Think of it as a survival exercise, Herr von Eiben."

"Help me!"

"Keep back!"

There was a rushing sound and something came hurtling through the air and fell on the grass at his feet. There was a crackling of static electricity, blue fire hovered above the spring. He had a fleeting impression of a wiry, white-haired person in a pearl-green, trilobal tracksuit.

Wolf-Dietrich saw more than he had at first; the chapel had completely gone. He realized that what he had taken for evening was in fact morning. Down in the valley there was something that looked very much like a village; up on the hill some building work was in progress. He stooped down and picked up from the dewy grass a brown cloak with a hood, almost a monk's habit.

Frau Steiger decided not to join Katja and the young reporter for coffee at the Green Grotto. She wandered back to tidy up and check on Herr von Eiben. She was reassured to see his Porsche still on the company parking lot, but she began to worry again when she found his briefcase still on the table. Surely he had just slipped down to his office and meant to come back to the chapel.

She walked briskly down the nave, keeping well clear of that dangerous hole in the floor, and wondered what would happen on Monday. In the southwest corner, under the gallery, she suddenly noticed a couple of folding chairs and a little metal cabinet. Where on earth had these things come from? Without really meaning to she sat on one of the chairs and gazed, as she had done so often, at the St Boniface Chapel.

She could see it, after all her research, in a series of time-lapse pictures. With the spring... oh yes, there certainly had been a spring... and a whole succession of, well, tribes, with their priests. Winfrith had actually been here, she was certain of it; a tough, fightable, organization man who would admit no other gods but his. Years later, when he had given up all hope of martyrdom, the heathen Frisians got him unexpectedly in the north... under his *nom-de-guerre*, Bonifatius. Saint Boniface. A West Saxon, a sort of Englishman.

Frau Steiger felt a gentle touch on her sleeve. She saw that the metal cabinet had unfolded somehow and was offering her a choice of coffee or tea. She touched the keys for coffee, cream, sugar, and watched, beyond surprise, as the coffee appeared, steaming hot, in two enamel mugs. She was no longer alone. In the other chair was the old woman in a pearl-green track suit, the one she had seen, just for an instant, by the door. An apparition that she had censored as unsuitable, had dismissed as her own fantasy. A monk now, or at least a figure in a brown cloak and hood, was much more the sort of thing for this place. The old woman was panting slightly, as if from some exertion.

"Frau Steiger," she said, "I really can explain all this."

When Petra came rushing in and dropped her shield it was a splendid object lesson for Gran's explanation. She appeared from nowhere and flung herself at Gran's feet.

"Oh Gran! I was afraid you had... gone!"

"Wheesht, my dear," said Gran. "Have some coffee. Say hello to Frau Steiger."

Petra shook hands, proving that she was a German girl; she complimented Frau Steiger on her remarkable powers.

"If I follow you correctly, Frau Phillips," said Frau Steiger, "you and your group are not, strictly speaking, time-travellers. You don't come from the future."

"We are sometimes a little ahead of or behind the local time," said Gran Phillips. "As much as a couple of years."

"An awful lot of Companies turned up in Berlin on the right night," sighed Petra.

"And you would say that what you do is something between a research project, an experiment and... what was it?"

"A war game," said Petra.

"Very like a war game," said Gran. "It began when some of those old buzzards in Cambridge wanted to prove certain theories about time and probability."

"It wouldn't have been possible," said Petra cryptically, "if Igor Korosov hadn't read H.G. Wells."

"I don't want to get too technical," smiled Gran. "I believe we arrived just in time to save the chapel."

"I pray that you are right," said Frau Steiger.

She was aware that Frau Phillips was not being frank with her. It had to do with the valuable geomagnetic line that ran through the chapel, a focus for the deep earth-rays.

"I really must check on Herr von Eiben," she said. "I will take his briefcase to the watchmen's office."

In the middle of the night she woke up in her neat attic apartment miles from the Bonifatius-Kapelle and wondered if it might all have been a dream.

When the trolley had made camp, Gran Phillips sent Petra out to stock up on pizzas. She settled down comfortably, took care of all her data updates, and kept a watch on the thin silvery line of the disjunction, which she had marked with a preparation made from fish scales. The scales of a plesiosaur to be exact. In half an hour the first visiting company arrived: the University of Maryland Charm Quarks, in a jeep, out of Ramstein. For reasons of their own they were all wearing mediaeval costume.

As they photographed the casement and took readings, a tall, donnish old man came striding into the chapel. The Granddad of the Charm Quarks nudged Gran Phillips.

"Top Brass..."

It was the Panjandrum himself, Browne of the Shel-drake Irregulars, trailed by his personal assistant Emily, whom he had given the rank of Great-Aunt. He stared and pulled a lad in a *côtehardie* back from the brink.

"Remarkable!" he said testily. "We've had first-class teams in the area for years..."

"And now the honours have gone to an equivalent company," smiled Emily, who enjoyed teasing the Old Man. "Commonwealth lot. Not even Redbrick, let alone Ivy League."

"All right!" said Browne. "Splendid achievement for the bloody Wombats or the Rainbow Warriors..."

Petra stopped handing round pizza and said her piece. "No, Sir," she said, "the Rainbow Warriors are from the Sorbonne."

"Aha. And you are..."

"Erewhon Three. Combined New Zealand Universities."

"Peggy Phillips!" he ejaculated. "I might have known it! That woman has the luck of the damned!"

"Hello, Bingo," said Gran Phillips. "Hello, Em. Anything coming through from the outer isles?"

"Expecting feedback?" demanded Browne.

"Nothing so far, Peggy dear," said Emily.

They sank down into the last two folding chairs which the trolley had been saving just for them. They observed the magic casement.

"Going to release the spring, I suppose?" enquired the Panjandrum, when he had filled himself in a little on the background.

"Presently..." said Gran Phillips.

At 25 minutes to eleven Central European Time the message was received by the Charm Quarks' communications officer.

"It's incredible!" cried Granddad O'Riley. "Get this everyone! Professor Archibald McBride has reappeared on the shores of Loch Rae, near Ballnochie, Scotland. In good condition. Wearing a plaid, armed with targe, broadsword and dirk. Very rusty... No, I guess they mean his English."

"Peggy," said the Panjandrum sternly, "what have you been up to?"

"Bingo, how can you be so unfair!" exclaimed Emily. "Even if the acausality is not proven, this can't be Peggy's doing."

"I want a full report!" he said. "And be careful when you turn on the spring. These cross-dimensional things can be very tricky."

"Watch out for changelings," murmured Emily. "Fish. Dragonflies..."

"I would have thought," said Gran Phillips mildly, "that this reinforces the theory of a displacement towards the east. Exactly 66 point six metres."

"Yes," admitted Browne, accepting a cognac from the trolley. "But I won't go too far with the notion that the world beyond these casements is a construct!"

"Bingo," said Emily firmly, "you simply have a phobia about God. There is no clear evidence to suggest that the Constructor or Constructors owe anything to the Judeo-Christian tradition!"

"One day," said Gran Phillips, "we will simply have to go there and find out."

"Humph!" said Browne.

"The Grand Panjandrum is the only person I know," said Emily, "who actually says 'humph'."

When Herr Knapp, the watchman down at the plant, did his five o'clock round, he thought he had better take a look up the hill. There had been a few excited phone calls from the von Eiben family and the directors in the course of the night and the usual complaints from jumpy neighbours about goings-on in the old chapel. He thought it was probably that silly, young green lot having a final fling before the old place was pulled down.

By the time he got there, of course, everything was as quiet as you please; he looked in through the open side door and found the place completely empty. The sky, through the branches, was a very pale, shining blue: there was a fluttering of wings above his head. He potted along to the main door, following a small, constant sound.

"Himmel, Herr Gott, nochmal!" he whispered.

The water was welling up through the ancient pipe, seeping up through the ground, and overflowing the stone basin. He looked around for something, a rake, a stick, aha, a good, long broom handle leaning against the porch, still bearing a placard which said: *Get Lost, von Eiben!* As he scraped away the leaves and cleared a path for the water to run downhill, away from the chapel, it occurred to him that people would say this was a miracle. *Der heilige Bonifatius* had come through? No, that was going a bit far in his opinion.

He leaned on his broom handle and saw two young lovers coming up the lane. Yes, it was that bold girl, Fräulein Vogel, hand in hand with a tall young man, and she was wearing a T-shirt with a whale this time. There was really nothing to say: the three of them just stood there, in the dawn, watching the spring, a natural wonder.

"What do you think of that, Herr Knapp?" asked Katja Vogel, after a while.

"Lucky chance," he said. "We should all take a ticket in the lotto."

"You must have been first on the spot," said Keith. "Could I have some shots of you standing beside the spring?"

Herr Knapp thought he spoke quite good German and was a nice enough young chap, for a reporter.

"I've got a tip for you and your friend," he said to Katja. "That double-dealing asshole von Eiben has skipped. Left a couple of federal auditors standing on Frankfurt Airport."

"My God!" said Katja. "I must get to a phone!"

"Where do you think he's gone, Herr Knapp?" asked Keith.

"First stop Zürich," said the watchman, "just to clear out his numbered konto, then *olé, olé*, off to Rio! You mark my words!"

This was how most people regarded the disappearance of Wolf-Dietrich von Eiben; others blamed the CIA or the KGB. At nine o'clock on Monday morning the board of directors permitted the local Lutheran pastor to announce to a jubilant, but well-behaved crowd at the west portal that the St Boniface Chapel was saved. There were no longer any plans to demolish the building, a fund for its restoration would be opened, and a complete new geological report on the site would be obtained.

Gran Phillips and Petra slipped away from the crowd. They caught Frau Steiger just as she was coming out of the side door.

"Oh, Frau Phillips!" she cried. "What a happy day!"

"One more thing..." said Gran.

"I won't tell!" exclaimed Frau Steiger. "Your secrets are safe with me!"

"Of course they are," said Gran. "Just one more question. You caught a glimpse of me, by the side door. Did you see anything else?"

"I told Katja and Herr von Eiben that I had seen a rat," said Frau Steiger, "and that wasn't so very far from the truth."

“Something like a rat?” prompted Gran.

"Well, an animal," said Frau Steiger. "It went swooping out through the door. Just seconds after I saw you. A bat. Quite a big one."

"Get many bats round here?" asked Gran.

"There used to be one or two up in the gallery," said Frau Steiger. "Herr von Eiben was always threatening to call the exterminator."

They shook hands with Frau Steiger, and she hurried off back to the spring and the crowd of well-wishers. Gran stood on the step and glanced up into the trees.

"A bat," whispered Petra. "A bat from another world!"

"A changeling," said Gran. "We must do some very careful scanning."

They walked slowly round the chapel, skirted the edges of the crowd and took their way down the hill through the trees. There was Keith sitting with the trolley in their white Toyota van; Katja had gone off to a conference in Dresden; they had arranged to meet between their assignments.

"Gran!" said Petra suddenly, "there's an occulted series of obstacles between us and the autobahn!"

“Keith!” ordered Gran smartly over her intercom, “prepare the dispersal screens! We’re exposed to severe anxiety!”

They piled into the van and appeared to drive off in all directions. The cease-fear had ended.

Cherry Wilder has had three previous stories in *Interzone*, the last being “Bird on a Time Branch” (issue 57). Born in New Zealand, she has lived in Germany for many years and is the author of numerous sf/fantasy novels and short stories.

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Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

Now that the monsters have receded and we can pick ourselves gingerly up to contemplate the legacy of their passage, one vital thing that, to my notice, nobody has really confronted about *Jurassic Park* is what a very unorthodox piece of science-fiction cinema it is. It's something that sounds so-what obvious when you say it, but there are, I think, implications not only for the unchecked success of what could well turn out the most successful sf film of the decade, but more importantly for the way it's caught the popular and media imagination. Simply, this is an almost unprecedented, and surely the most significant ever, Hollywood shot at something that could generously be called old-fashioned hard sf. I can't think of a film since *Destination Moon* that has taken such care to validate the scientific credibility of its (in this case, largely preposterous) premise as something so overwhelmingly feasible that it could happen now, must happen eventually, and will happen as soon as the will and the possibility converge. Indeed, it's precisely because Hollywood itself has so little prior expertise in sf where the science actually matters that *Jurassic* itself is forced into some pretty wild communicative adventures, both internal and external. Quite apart from the masterly solution devised to the huge problems of technical exposition demanded in the film itself ("Whoops, Mr DNA! Where did you come from?" "From your blood!"), it requires even its own director to master a whole new language of promotional gubbldegloop to try and dissociate this purest of real-sf films from the actual concept of sf as such. For this isn't science fiction, you know, it's (yes? well? go on, Stevie, what is it? science fact? pull the other) "science EVENTUALITY." Well, stone me (smites forehead), fancy not spotting that, good old Sci-Ev, now there's a genre whose time has come.

For the problem is that hard sf is an enormously powerful drug. In those who haven't built up their tolerance over years, it can stimulate the pleasure centres to undreamed-of levels of intensity, but at an alarming cost in

intellectual confusion, fogged judgment, and the rampant talking of bollocks on a massive scale. And one crucial diagnostic danger sign is the abuse of the future simple, that inability to distinguish critically between wish-fulfilment and prediction that *Great Mambo Chicken* dubbed *fin-de-siècle* hubristic mania: a genial faith in scientific dreams as merely science postponed, and in the benign inevitability of technological liberation from such temporary irritants as death, evil, stupidity, failure, all those limitations of time and space and flesh our species has up to now been dim enough to take for granted. Inexperienced hard-sf consumers can all too easily succumb to the fancy that all you need is the technical vision to recognize a traversable pathway from present through imminent to eventual scientific attainment, whereupon all distinction between sf and futurology dematerializes harmlessly away. And in this case, one unique and rather scary legacy of *Jurassic Park* whose long-term consequences are unknown is that millions of people now genuinely believe that one day, perhaps in their lifetimes, the dinosauria will be back. Henceforward, if you're frustrated about the ongoing extinction of species and time-trips to the Cretaceous being merely a Bradbury dream, all you need do is hold your breath and close your eyes and wish, and Science Eventuality promises that very soon we'll all awake to a happy morning when the graves of earth will open and all the animals that fell off the ark, or were pushed, will be gambolling about in a glorious Riverworld of the will. And there's no limit! Thanks to the miracle of cloning, not only will the plains of Serengeti swarm with frisky stegosaurs, but soon our very shopping malls will teem with Boys-from-Brazil replicas of Jimmy Dean, Elvis, and (of course) Philip Dick, with millennial foundations queueing up to be the first to extract a viable nucleus from the white cells off the Turin Shroud.

And these are of course precisely the matters on which Michael Crichton, one of the last and least reconstructed of the original 70s

doomwatch dystopics, has been airing such consistent and curmudgeonly views for most of a quarter of a century: that science, especially biotechnology, and most especially biotechnology driven by capitalist market forces, is a disastrously unregulated and intrinsically irresponsible enterprise that sooner or later is going to blow up in the face of the whole world and take off half the front of its head. Indeed, the original *Jurassic Park* novel is as typical of his oeuvre as anything, down to its trademark narrative line of absurd suspense set-pieces broken up with the usual techy-looking tables and ranting insert lectures on scientific ethics; and while its trashy writing, crudely cinematic structure, ricepaper characterizations, and heavy recycling of devices and preoccupations from his earlier work make it far from his strongest piece of fiction, it does undeniably embed some of his finest polemical essays in the soapbox popchaos monologues of his mathematician mouthpiece, as well as offering, in Isla Nubar's evocative fusion of Masai Mara and Disney World, easily his most resonant allegory yet of the volatile two-way relationship between nature and its human exploiters.

Rewritten for Spielberg, however, both the material and the message find themselves uneasily subverted in translation. I don't mean the familiar abundance of glaringly inane Hollywoodizations – the Neill/Dern romance, the reinvention of the plot as a residential weekend course in parenting, the drastic adjustments to the deathlist (ensuring Goldblum and Attenborough survive for a sequel, while Peck and the weaselly lawyer get eaten instead), the conversion of people's champion T. Rex from villain to closet goodie at the climax, and especially the softened, ambiguously upbeat ending. Far more worrying than these mild facials to what, let's admit, is in novelistic terms a fairly low-grade slab of airport fiction are the numerous coy but insistent touches that transmute Crichton's actual antiscience argument, already undermined by the heightened ooh-gosh factor, into a smug, self-congratulatory homily on the ethics of cinema itself. One can for-

give, I think, the more upfront stuff like the rewriting of the Attenborough character as an *apologia pro vita sua*, a benign but overinnocent Spielbergian showman in search of a spectacle that will restore the vistas of childhood; and it's pointless to be offended by the knowing way that things like the famous pan across the merchandising racks accept and positively provoke the inevitable parallels in the exploitation of Jurassic Park and Jurassic Park. Where the film's argument starts to get queasy, rather, is where it tries to reassure us there are fundamental and absolute moral differences: that science is bad but movies are good, Jurassic Park being a criminal act against nature, but Jurassic Park ok because its exploitation of extinct creatures is only a harmless fantasy, so that film itself becomes the magic-bullet solution to all the novel's supposedly irresolvable ethical dilemmas.

Yes, kids, you can have your King Cone and eat it: you can exploit the miracle of millennial technology to visit lost worlds, spy on dead monsters, do the white-knuckle ride and be scared out of your boxers while simultaneously booing the utter reprehensibility of the science that makes it possible, so long as you do it all exclusively through the magic of movies. Now, obviously, it's laudable to reaffirm the healthiness of perceiving any sort of boundary between prediction and fantasy; but in Spielberg's version the nature of that boundary has more to do with the conceit of the filmmaker as Faust ("I wanted," says a mournful Attenborough, "to show them something that wasn't an illusion: something that was real, something they could feel and touch") than with the far bigger issues about science and nature Crichton himself was banging on about, which are deplorably cheapened and evaded by the shift — like piping up at CITES talks to say: Well, gentlemen, regardless of whether a controlled ivory trade is good or bad for elephant populations, thank goodness we'll always be able to rent *The Jungle Book*. Yet it goes, of course, without saying that, faced with the overwhelming compulsive force of a terrific premise, irresistible off-Boulevard casting, and inordinately high-quality filmmaking put to work in the service of a classical Spielberg cocktail of daft suspense with drooling sense-of-wonder, such niggard reservations are doomed to seem like picking at mites, and in the end the monsters will have their unstoppable way. Besides, all this is frankly minutiae anyway compared with the one really huge disappointment, the inexplicable non-materialization of Bob Peck's dour intimations about velociraptor dress sense ("And their astonishing jumpers..."). There are still some things that really don't



deserve to be left in the realm of imagination.

In poignant connection, it's worth taking brief note of a largely unremarked real-life attempt to excavate, clone, and revive an extinct reptilian order that in its day was one of the most successful competitors in the system, growing huge and fat on a steady browse of many times its own body weight in greenstuff. I can't imagine anyone reading this would take the trouble to watch **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III** unless they happen to pull the short straw over who gets the seven-year-old out of the house; and indeed the brief, desperate matinees-only release is itself a sober acknowledgment that to all but the least discriminant the Turtles are mayfly corpses, yesterday's dudes still feebly bantering the handmedown argot of a vanished generation of all-too-transient hip — "most excellent!", "schwingg!", and similar mottoes of the unquiet fluttering sad. Yet this is actually a far more interesting, if not necessarily entertaining, picture than I've seen it given credit, and a far more adventurous extension to its series than strict commercial sense would have dictated; for it's in *III* that the cycle finally reasserts its distinctive cinematic roots over its comics, cartoon and merchandising *raison d'être*, and sheds its Hollywood street clothes to stand proudly forth as the classical Hong Kong stunt pic from which it, and its production company, originally sprang.

In a storyline that owes far more to Tsui Hark's *Swordsman* and *Once Upon a Time in China* cycles (even

reusing some of the same locations) than to the earlier Turtle vehicles, the tiresome amphibians are plucked from the comfortable surroundings of their NY home and comic-book villainy to mediate in a culture war in 1603 Japan over a village caught between feudal warlords on the one hand and gun-running English capitalists on the other. At once a classic period martial-arts plot and a heavy allegory of the films' own ambivalent position as the first true hybrid between the action cinemas of east and west, this engaging scenario is further enlivened by some sublime mugging from Stuart Wilson as the Hammeresque Anglo baddie, and hobbled only by the unfortunate presence of the dependably charmless and indistinguishable Turtles themselves, who are stranded helplessly on their backs not merely in the wrong time and place but in the wrong genre and under the dissatisfied gaze of entirely the wrong audience. "We will both die, but only one of us with honour" is the kind of line to send a thrill down any connoisseur of That John Woo Moment; but it's offered instead to the querulous bafflement of a congregation of accompanied tots assembled for the worship of their formerly-favourite toys. And alas, the summer's display racks have themselves long since had to make room, as the Turtles' former grazing-grounds are invaded by huge and hungry newcomers, and their merchandising habitat shrunk to a fragment of its old territory. The climate was already shifting against them, and this season the bolide struck. Tough crusts, dudes. See you in the fossil record.

(Nick Lowe)

ISSUE THREE



AUTUMN 1993

GOLLANCZ

Gollancz is delighted to be publishing Michael Scott Rohan's new fantasy novel as a lead title this October. *Cloud Castles* is the stunning conclusion to the story that began with *Chase the Morning* and *The Gates of Noon* and we're sure that it will meet with the same critical success these first two books received. *Interzone* described *Chase the Morning* as 'a gem... a rich, satisfying brew'.

The final extract in this issue of *Interzone* is from John Whitbourn's second novel, *Popes and Phantoms*. Featuring a magnificently Machiavellian anti-hero, this inventive and witty fantasy more than confirms the promise seen in Whitbourn's first book, *A Dangerous Energy* which won the BBC Bookshelf/Victor Gollancz First Fantasy Novel Competition.

Other new and exciting books coming out this Autumn: Pratchett fans will be looking forward to *Men at Arms*, the first new Discworld novel this year. Watch out also for Simon R. Green's sequel to *Blue Moon Rising* and *Blood and Honour*, *Down Among the Dead Men* which will be published both in hardback and large format paperback. *Ghost World*, an original science fiction paperback from Simon R. Green will be coming out in September. And there's much, much, more...

We hope you will enjoy the extracts which follow. As before, do continue to send your comments to us at Gollancz, Villiers House, 41-47 Strand, London WC2N 5JE addressed to the Promotions Department.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Evans

Publishing Director

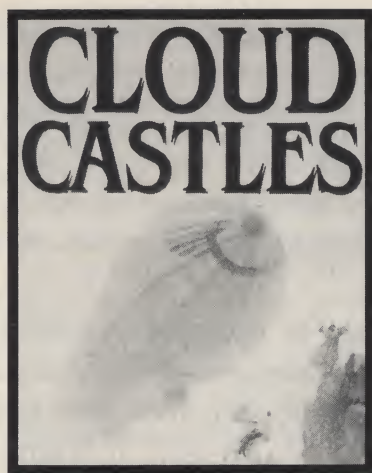
THIS ISSUE OF THE
GOLLANCZ SF/FANTASY PREVIEW FEATURES THE WORK OF:

MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN



JOHN WHITBOURN





Spiral, Steve and some old friends break into the mansion of a German aristocrat they suspect of dealing with dark and dangerous forces...

After two hair-raising encounters with the

I kicked back a flap, and we shone our torches. Around the margins of the room the marble was plain grey, the kind you find in expensive office lobbies world-wide. But as Mall kicked away the rest she revealed arcs of richer inlay, obviously the wide circle or ring I'd glimpsed; Jyp and Katjka stepped hastily back, pulling me with them, to be sure we stood outside it. We stared at what lay revealed.

Mall was the first to break the silence, with a soft uncanny laugh. 'What pretty plaything is this?'

It was just as I'd glimpsed it, filling the whole centre of the room: a ring of darker stone inlaid with fine wire script; but across it, from rim to rim, lay thick straight strips of gold, forming that ill-omened star shape I remembered, its jagged pinnacles joined at the peaks and across the base to form inner and outer pentagons. The design of the shapes, even that cool grey background had a 1930s' look to it – not Bauhaus, but that heavy hard-edged classical line you see dotted all over Munich, with the swastikas chipped off it. But now I could see what lay in the marble beneath, a great streak of textured inlay, almost shapeless; in the uneven flashlight it might have been a bloodstain or an abstract flame.

'E'en as you said Master Stephen – e'en as we saw on the *Chorazin's* stern, true enough. A pentacle – but a pentacle's such a device as may serve many a turn, both good and ill, and be made in many fashions. Such as this I never saw before, with that swathe across the heart. Nor can I read this curst inscription! I'd have looked to find arcane signs, Greek figuring, Hebrew or Sanskrit ciphers, emblems elemental or zodiacal – or other alchemic or astrology. Were it not so concealed I'd think little enough o't.'

'Seems bare somehow,' agreed Jyp softly, thumbing his narrow jaw. 'Might be signs tricked up and twisted into all that fine

CLOUD CASTLES

filigree stuff,' he added, flicking his flashlight across it. 'Good way to conceal 'em, maybe. Or maybe not.'

I began to feel stupid. Had I just started at shadows? Had I led everyone on a wild-goose chase? It didn't seem possible – and yet they didn't seem at all excited by what we'd found. 'But this pattern underneath, in the pentagon here, what about that? I was hoping—'

Jyp clicked his tongue softly. 'New one on me. Might be just a decoration of some kind, no real meaning. Mind you, now...' The words seemed to be dragged out of him. 'Gone to a mort of trouble just to say nothing, haven't they? And spent a whole heap of spondulicks.'

He had a point there. My torch glowed on white English marble, black German, raw-meat pink Carrara that must have cost a fortune, green from God alone knew where and plummy brown with dark red veining, all separated by fine lines of gold. Yet all that costly material had been carefully pieced into nothing but a shapeless splash of colour. Seen this close, it was divided into a mass of rough-edged concentric shapes, a comic-book explosion smudged across the heart of the design, as if mocking the stiff regularity of the golden bars above. 'Kind of like fire, isn't it? Mall?'

'Aye, though a flame would hardly be limned i' those hues. Nor is it all within the pentagon.' She kicked the edges of the carpet wider. 'See, it crosses it here – and here, right to the outer margin of the circle.'

'Now hold hard there a minute!' said Jyp, softly but with mounting urgency. 'Belay! Seeing it whole like that – dammit, I'm beginning to recognize something!'

I began to feel that, too. 'Something I've seen before, often, but nowhere like this...' An amoeba, maybe. There was something amoeboid about it, with the light spot at the heart like a nucleus and long pseudopods stretching out in every direction. You half expected it to come flowing out towards you – but that was crazy. I swallowed. What was the matter with me?

Mall shrugged. 'Then you've the vantage of me; but this is a place such as sets cobwebs i' the head. What says our space-witch?'

Only then we realized we hadn't heard a

word out of Katjka. We turned as one, and saw her standing there, arms outstretched, hands working in convulsive tangling patterns, repeated over and over. '*Idiotss!*' she hissed, grinning with the effort of speaking. 'Deluded *fools!* Did I not warn you it would be guarded? Do you not wonder why you are sso uncertain?'

We gaped at each other, slack-jawed. We felt it as soon as she said it, weighing down on us like a stifling mantle, obscuring our thoughts. *Nothing much...not important...doesn't matter...forget it...forget...*

Suddenly my heart was stuttering. 'You mean... they know we're here?'

Jyp snatched for his sword. 'They're coming? We've gotta—'

Katjka half laughed. 'Fear – is the next defence! I told you this was besst left to me! Go, before you trigger things worse!'

'Not without you!' cried Mall, and drew her sword with a menacing hiss.

I caught her arm. 'The sign – our one chance, remember?'

'Jehosaphat, it's a map!' yelled Jyp.

'What?' cried Mall.

'Christ, you're right!' I shouted. 'I should've known at once – a topographic map, the kind I use for climbing! And dammit, this one's of a mountain, too!'

'Right!' barked Jyp excitedly. 'The colours are the contours, the higher the lighter, right up to the spot in the centre.' His torch-beam touched it.

The sound was immediate; it might have been a high wind, or a howling of many voices. So were the shadows, shadows that seemed to fall from the flashlight beam but stayed as it swept back, strong dark shadows across the map, creating strange streaks and pits and hollows, the illusion of detail, of three dimensions. Only it wasn't an illusion. The shape in the pentagon was solid, swelling, rising, a looming mass of shadow spotted with sparks of fiery light, wreathed in swirling streaks like haloes of windborne cloud. And at the same instant the floor seemed to lurch under me, to tilt and slope inwards towards that smoky vision. I staggered, lost my balance, fell and slid. I clutched a handful of carpet and caught myself, managed to thrust my sword back into my belt but almost lost my grip. Jyp, hanging on higher up, grabbed me by the wrist and swung me back again. But the slope was steepening, throwing more and more of our weight onto our arms. The thing looked like a model mountain at the bottom of a pit now, pentagon and circle blotted out. I could even see tiny bristlings of dense forest on its flanks, and the bare rock at its summit gleaming under the moon. We were hanging on around the pit mouth, like ants

scrabbling to escape an ant-lion. On the far side dangled Katjka, her petticoats flaring as she kicked out desperately for a foothold; and where the hell was Mall?

I grabbed another fistful of the carpet, so Jyp could let go. I boosted him up by his heel, but he managed only another foot or two before sliding back. I kicked my heels down, and almost lost my grip again when I felt them dig into earth and rock; the slope was a hillside now, a steep valley side sloping down towards the swelling mountain at its heart. I boosted Jyp again, and he gained another foot or two; but he was incredibly strong. How long could Katjka hang on? 'Keep trying!' I yelled. 'I'm going after her!'

I heard his grunted reply, but it was obvious he couldn't move easily from where he was. I tested my foothold, and let go the carpet. Even as it left my fingers it felt like a grass tussock. I snatched out as my foothold gave, caught the stem of a scrubby bush and inched my way over, kicking another hold. But the slope was getting steeper still, precipitous now, and widening, so that Katjka seemed to be receding. I saw her get a foothold as I had, and called out to her.

'*Get away!*' she screamed. 'Idiot boy, you do not know what you rissk! Leave me, get back, save yourself!' Red light from below flickered on her bare legs as she fought the slope. 'Go!' she yelled again. 'I am not worth it!'

Smoke boiled up around us, pungent, stinging, full of resin and sulphur and worse, and I coughed violently; but I clawed at the earth and stones, feeling my fingernails splinter and tear. I could still reach her – but what then? Fall with her? We'd be on a cliff by then.

Too bad; I was past making sense now. I kicked another hold, reached out to a solid-seeming tussock – and felt it spill loose in my hand. My hold gave, I slipped, twisted, swung by one hand from the wiry little bush-stem, facing outward into the smoky chasm. Then I screamed aloud. Through the smoke, like a falling comet, a great pale flame rushed in towards me, as if to envelop me; and I all but let go. '*Stephen!*' cried the fire; and I saw the human shape of it, the corona of hair that billowed around the head like a halo and streamed out like wisps of smoke behind. It was Mall, centuries old, near-immortal wanderer on the Outward paths of the Spiral, in the aspect that burned within her, yet rose to view only rarely and at times of terrible danger. One day, maybe, it would consume all that was mortal in her, and leave her demi-goddess indeed; for now it was fitful, draining, but terrible to encounter for friend and foe alike. Out of the flame a hand reached, coursing with the same cool fire, and caught mine; tingling agony danced over my wrist. Even in this aspect Mall couldn't fly –

not yet, perhaps; but she had caught our rope, and swung over the abyss.

'Jyp -' I choked.

'He's safe! Now save me the witch, for I cannot reach her alone!'

Her voice echoed among vast spaces. Clutching at her, I felt something of the same flame awaken, burning and tingling in my bones. I laughed, lightheaded, and cast loose with a springing kick. Over the abyss we swung, I reached out; Katjka caught my hand.

And screamed, an ear-splitting shriek of real pain; her grip flew off, but I clamped my hand on her wrist again. She struggled convulsively, and I stared down, saw the flames that danced over my arms, not pale, but golden, as if altered somehow. Little electric flickers of them rode down her writhing arm and danced across her twisted features.

'Hang on, you stupid bitch!' I yelled. 'D'you

want to lose us both?'

Her eyes, screwed shut, flashed open suddenly, and glared into mine. I almost let go. The pupils rolled and boiled like blazing cauldrons, red flame, consuming flames, and beneath her, out of the smoke, something flashed by. She swung, violently, and screamed with fright, as if something had snatched at her. 'Haul up!' I shouted. 'Up, for God's sake! Up!'

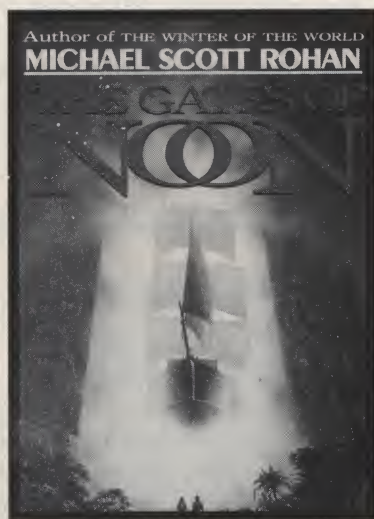
Hardback, £15.99, paperback, £8.99

Michael Scott Rohan is half-French and half-Scottish. His first novel, Run to the Stars, was followed by the Winter of the World trilogy and the first two novels in the Spiral series, Chase the Morning and The Gates of Noon.

He lives in Leeds with his wife.



MICHAEL SCOTT ROHAN



THE GATES OF NOON

Steve Fisher is a successful, but lonely businessman. On various

occasions in the past he has become involved with the Spiral – a place that exists alongside our own world, where myth and legend are reality. On a business trip to Bangkok, Steve has been contacted by the Spiral – in no friendly way. Now, back home, he and a colleague are looking for answers...

Steps divided the wharf from its neighbour, apparently the Callão Wharf, steps that led down to a lower quay where ships' boats and the like might land; but it was crumbling and slathered in green weed and slime. Beyond them yet another murky alley opened, but not too far down it I was surprised to see a dim glow mirrored in the puddles. Unquestionably lit windows, but not very bright, showing reddish and sullen on the signboard that creaked back and forth like a gibbet above.

'Bloody hell!' muttered Dave as we trooped down towards it. 'Looks worse than a motorway service station.'

'On a Bank Holiday, right. Can't hurt to ask, though, can it?'

'I don't know,' he muttered, skirting an oily pool by the doorstep. 'This place gives me the heaves.' As I pushed open the door I was inclined to agree with him. The smell that poured out seemed to be mostly bad tobacco and greasy frying at first, till you caught the whiffs of stale drink, unwashed bodies, vomit and worse that made you grateful for the smoke. Inside it was small and dim, lit by smoky candle lanterns on the low rafters, the soot-stained ceiling soaking up their light. Men sat there in the shadows, hunched over tables. Some were black, others pale-skinned, but that was all I could say of them, save for the gleam of eyes that turned towards us. Talk faded to a low growl. A big pot-bellied lout clad in a ragged shirt and kneebreeches bound with a black sash surged to his feet from the nearest table and looked us up and down,



sizing us up.

‘¿*Qué quereis?*’ Spanish wasn’t his native language any more than it was mine, and the tone was just short of spitting in our faces.

I spread my hands with all the mild dignity I could muster. ‘¿*Perdóneme, señor, queremos descubrir la Taverna Illyrica, por favor?*’

Even in that bilious light I could have sworn he went pale. ‘*iNo sé!*’ he barked, with the aggressive force of a man reacting against his own weakness. To my astonishment he stabbed out two fingers in the horned sign against the Evil Eye, and spat on my shoe. Almost any other time I might just have turned on my heel and left, but my blood was singing with the sight of those ships against the sunset, and the memories they awoke. I kicked out and wiped my shoe on his breeches with considerable force. He howled, hopped and grabbed at his sash. For a knife, I guessed; I grabbed his shirt and threw him back across the table. Then I turned on my heel. Dave caught at my jacket and practically hauled me out the door.

‘Christ, what’s got into you? Let’s get out of here before they cut our throats. Or worse! How could you do that?’

‘Don’t run,’ I said. ‘That’d just bait them. Act confident.’ Mirrored in a dirty window opposite, I saw the door of the den swing open behind us, silhouetting a figure against the red light – no, two or three. But they weren’t coming out. Calmly I looked back. One of them waved, mockingly. ‘*iBuenos noches, señor! Nos respetamos à los bultòs!*’

The door slammed. ‘Lousy Spanish,’ said Dave, with only a slight tremor in his voice. ‘Worse than mine. Why’re we supposed to give their respects to the ... that word just means bundles, doesn’t it?’

‘They’re not Spaniards, that’s for sure. I wonder why they thought we were?’ I looked back at the sign. ‘*Den ... Vijnkeller something. Marowijnse*, maybe. Sounds Dutch. And the Netherlands used to be Spanish, once; some of their colonies, too. So maybe for those heavies using Spanish was an insult in itself. And *bultòs* ... I suppose it does mean bundles. God knows why. Another insult, probably. Come on, let’s find somewhere friendlier.’

But as we walked back to the wharf through the gathering darkness, it came to me that I did know something. *Bundles* ... I’d heard that word, or something like it. From Jyp? Maybe; and in no light tone, either. Something bad – and it was just then that I heard the titter from the darkness ahead.

A titter, a very human sound, but high-pitched, piping; a soft scuffing of feet, as of stealthy movement; a faint dry rustle, and *that* sounded thoroughly insectile. Dave had heard it, too. His whisper was almost lost in the sea-hiss. ‘If

it’s those bloody dacoits again–’

‘I don’t think it is,’ I breathed. ‘Whatever, it’s between us and the wharves – but only on the shadowy side of the street. If we can sort of sidle round – then we bolt for the car.’

We moved swiftly, quietly, ducking back across the street and under the shadow of the wall opposite; but as we crossed, just for an instant we put the last glow of the sky behind what lurked there. At first I thought it was just a man, a bulky shape on thin legs – very thin – wearing something that covered arms and head. But then, as it swung about, searching, I saw it was solid, that there was no head or arm, only shreds of thin fabric that flapped as it moved, like an old-fashioned burlap sack. Then another one moved up beside it, and it was the same. I heard Dave’s teeth grind with the strain. But just a few steps more and we’d be past them.

That hellish titter sounded again, right in my ear. ‘*Run!*’ I yelled, but I could have saved my breath. Dave was already on the move. I panted after him – and behind me I heard a sudden savage rush of feet, one I’d heard before. We rounded the corner and ran for the wharf, for the car. The first night I’d ever come here, something had followed me back to my car – something that had trailed me, then come rushing after me. I’d never seen what; but it sounded just like that. We reached the car, piled in over the doors with fine disregard for the paintwork. There was an awful moment while I fumbled for my keys, and then the power of the engine roared out into the stillness. I spun the wheel, swinging the car round in a narrow arc towards the wharfside.

‘Hey, hold it!’ howled Dave. ‘You’re not going back–’

My offside tyres rose up on the timbers at the brink, barely making the turn, then bounced back down. I flicked my lights full on and let their beams sweep the wharf. There was nothing. Smiling grimly, I changed gear and we went bouncing off down the wharf. ‘Didn’t think they’d risk the car,’ I grinned, and then we passed the mouth of the alleyway, and they came boiling out after us. Nightmare things, shapeless things swathed in rope and rustling mummy-wrappings, bounding with horrid energy on legs so bare and wiry they looked less human than they actually were. Out around the car they leaped and hopped, collided into it with heavy thumps that sent us skeeting and swerving wildly. One hopped on to the narrow running-board with a force that almost turned us out and over the edge, into the deep harbour; but Dave rose in his seat and aimed a powerful kick that sent the awful thing flying into the path of its fellows. This close you could see that within those wrappings things were stirring, bulging, threshing as if they

were about to burst through the rotten-looking coverings; heads or limbs, maybe, but it looked less normal than that, and more malevolent. Out of the alleys they spilled, banging into the car like moths to a light, and I couldn't get up more speed. The windscreen shattered, and I punched it through, barely in time to see another set of steps loom up ahead. I flung the wheel around, the back end fishtailed and sent the monstrosities scattering. One wheel screamed over emptiness a moment, then we were bouncing and jarring down a narrow alley.

'It's getting *narrower*, Steve!' The rising note of hysteria in Dave's voice echoed my own fears. If we had to stop – if they caught us – would those ragged bundles burst? Would what squirmed within there be revealed to us? And what would happen then?

Dave yelled and pointed. Another narrow street opened to the left, and down it gleamed a spot of molten gold. I spun the wheel again, the tyres screeched on the cobbles – and just at the wrong moment a wall of the things hit us amidships. The wing crumpled, the car rocked, tipped up violently, then came crashing back down on its suspension and sped on. I peered through the shattered screen, weaving and dodging along the narrow lane. One of the things was caught against the wall, pinned, dragged – in my cracked rearview mirror I saw the ropes burst,

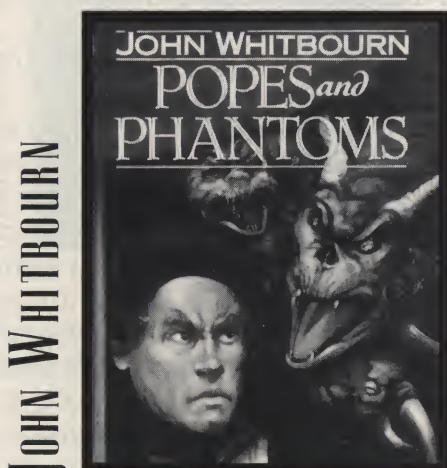
the sacking explode outwards. Maybe it was merciful Dave caught my arm just then, and I missed a closer look at what came spilling out. 'There!' he screamed. 'That somewhere?'

Red woodwork, white walls, florid sign-board and warmly glowing windows ... 'Can't you see?' I shouted, unfairly startled that he even needed to ask. 'That's it!'

Across the road opposite the side wall of the Illyrian Tavern loomed up. Praying that there wasn't anyone else on the road, I launched the car out and hauled her round in a terrible screeching curve, right at the bottom of the steps. But even as I jerked the handbrake, the heavy door was flung back with a crash. Into the opening, claspings a scarlet mantle close about her, stepped the girl I knew as Katjka. In one hand she held a heavy ship's lantern, and as we jolted to a halt at the foot of the steps she swung it high, shouting aloud, and flicked open its stormshield with a clatter.

Paperback, £4.99

The Gates of Noon was described by Locus as 'an exhilarating mix of contemporary fantasy, Indonesian myth and adventure on the high seas. Outstanding', and by Kirkus Reviews as 'Hard-working and different, with tons of local colour, bustle and noise. Often dazzling'.



JOHN WHITBOURN

POPES *and* PHANTOMS

In an alternate, magical Renaissance, the notorious

Admiral Slovo reviews his full and bloody career. He has been a man of his time, but of more than one dimension...

The Year 1486

'Swimming Lessons: After a sad and lonely childhood, cast as an orphan into the wicked world, I discover my vocation and philosophy of life. Piracy suits me very well.'

'No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid you'll have to walk home.'

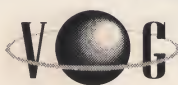
The Venetian nobleman looked down at Admiral Slovo and raised an enquiring eyebrow.

'Well, yes, I know,' explained Slovo to the man poised on the deck rail. 'Call me faithless if you like...'

'You are faithless,' obliged the Venetian. 'You promised me my life.'

'Agreed,' conceded the Admiral, folding his arms and leaning convivially against the rail, beside the Venetian's feet. 'But that was then and this is...'

'Now. Yes, I quite see,' interrupted the



nobleman. 'And I must say I take your decision personally, you know.'

'Oh dear, I do wish you wouldn't,' replied Slovo, reasonably. 'Put yourself in my shoes...'

Some of the crew, who had nothing better to do than watch the show, found grounds for bestial amusement at this aside but the Admiral silenced them with a glance.

'What I *mean*,' he continued, 'is that despite doubtless genuine grounds for grievance, you are refusing to see the problem in the round. His Holiness and your Serene Republic are nominally at peace at this juncture. It would not do, therefore, for me to return to Ostia bearing the sole survivor of a forbidden piratical venture, would it now?'

They both turned to look at the nearby once-grand galley, now afire and sinking; its crew (bar one) dead in battle or by subsequent murder, still aboard.

'Come to think of it,' the Admiral mused, 'my commission from His Holiness even precludes attacks on fellow Christians. Venetian though you may be, I assume that you come within that category...?' And when the nobleman shrugged, Slovo added, 'Well, there you are then, you see the quandary my greed-inspired oath puts me in.'

The Venetian looked underwhelmed by the Admiral's dilemma. 'You just want my library, that's what it is,' he stated calmly. 'I saw you leafing through it with lust in your eyes. You wish for undisputed title.'

Admiral Slovo admitted the possibility with a shift of the shoulders. 'Well, that may have something to do with it, but I'd thank you to keep your voice down. Bibliomania does not accord with my professional image. The crew might nurture false notions, requiring bloody suppression.'

'That library has been generations in the acquiring,' said the Venetian firmly. 'I'm not giving it up.'

Admiral Slovo stood up and stretched. 'I'm rather afraid you are,' he said. 'To prepare yourself for Paradise, your books and heart must surely part. Now off you go, there's a good chap.'

The Venetian glowered at the half circle of buccaneers below him but realized that his position was futile. 'I do not consider this conversation to be at an end,' he said equably. The pirates smiled. Then, with as much dignity as could be mustered, he turned and walked off the plank into the Mediterranean sea.

'Stop oars!'

The strokemaster's roar echoed off into silence. All the crew were shifting in their

appointed stations and straining to see.

'Keep to your places, if you please,' said Admiral Slovo to his Bosun. As intended, he relayed the command to the crew in louder and coarser terms. There was a just acceptable lowering of the level of frenzy.

'Look, there he is!' shouted the look-out in the stern. 'Out there!'

Slovo strode to join him and peered into the distant blue. 'It's possible,' he conceded eventually. 'How interesting.'

The Bosun, who had no other name known to man, had for career's sake emphasized the animal within but in fact he retained a worthwhile intellect and was invited to join them.

'Can't be sure at that distance,' he barked. 'It's blurred – might be jetsam.'

'I think not,' said the Admiral authoritatively. 'I have never heard of swimming jetsam. Look, one can see the rise of an arm.'

'There's any number of overboards in the sea,' replied the Bosun indefatigably. 'It don't mean it's our man.'

Slovo nodded his tentative agreement. 'I don't see how it can be the Venetian either. He could hardly have lasted two days in the water. On the other hand, it does look awfully like him. If only he'd come a little closer so that his face was less ... indistinct.'

Bosun looked shocked at the expression of such a wish. 'Let me go and get my crossbow, Admiral,' he asked. 'That'll sort him!'

'I think not,' answered Slovo slowly. 'If it's a mere lost sailor, the sea will soon deal with the matter. Should, however, it be the Venetian, I cannot but feel that our weaponry will be of little avail. If we must be pursued by a revenant, I'd prefer it not to have a crossbow bolt in its brow.'

Bosun was thinking this one through when, with a voice of joy, he noted that the figure had gone. In an explosion of relief, the crew threw discipline to the winds and scrambled to line the sides. No one had the heart to reprimand them. In a silence broken only by the call of gulls, everyone searched the waves for their obscure and elusive companion of the last day and night.

'Down to Hell and fare ye well,' said Bosun at last, when all agreed that sea and sky were all there was to see.

The celebration was spoilt by the sound, starting low but rising to a thunderous roar, distorted by its passage through water and hull, of knocking from beneath the ship.

After a further day of being shadowed at the very edge of sight, quite regardless of whatever turn of speed that wind and oar could produce, Admiral

Slovo decided to head for land. For all he cared, the dead Venetian could follow him

and hammer on his ship for eternity. Alas, however, the crew were not so philosophical. Even Bosun, who feared neither God nor State (not fully understanding the power of either) was getting edgy. Slovo, who maintained control by a record of success and the occasional exemplary death, knew when not to push his luck too far.

As they rowed home with unusual will, Slovo dallied at the stern and considered what problems this change of heart would bring. His words to the Venetian about inter-Christian piracy had not been idle ones and should their companion remain, a leech-like embarrassment, when they came to dock, then ... difficult questions would be asked.

Still, never mind, thought the Admiral at length, never one to worry long. *Better the chance of a Papal scaffold than the certainty of mutiny*. He even waved to the Venetian with his newly acquired reading book, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*.

'This is good stuff,' he shouted. 'I'm much obliged to you.'

Slovo was awoken by the sound of a ragged rattle of oars and a lack of progress. He had only to raise himself up from the deck to discover the reason for both.

Half a league off and silhouetted against the dawn was the Venetian, standing on the water and blocking their path.

Order took a bit of time to restore, even with the flat of a sword, and in the end it was easiest just to tell them to put about. That at least, the crew were glad to do.

One bank of oarsmen fidgeted on their benches whilst the other furiously tore at the sea and, bit by bit, gradually turned the galley's back on the sodden, silent, watcher. Then, using their joint efforts, they sped away from home into deep water, for once not needing the strokemaster's hypnotic call.

Admiral Slovo, seated at the stern, studied the swiftly receding Venetian and the compliment was returned in kind. Then, mission apparently fulfilled, the corpse slowly slipped back, inch by inch, beneath the waves, its guessed-at gaze never deviating until the water closed over its green, floating locks.

Bosun shuddered, not caring who saw him do so.

'I've not seen the ship move so fast since that encounter with the Ottoman harem-ship,' said the Admiral, jocularly. Bosun appeared not to hear him and Slovo felt entitled to allow his disgruntlement a further outing. 'I spent what was it?' he mused, 'on the Satan's-head ram which adorns the prow of this ship. Why then, Master Bosun, did we not employ it to sunder apart this persistent little man who dogs our steps?'

Before Bosun could reply, the look-out called out. 'Ahoy! he's back!'

They saw that this was so. The swimmer had returned.

'Might is right – but not always applicable,' said Bosun in reply to Slovo – inadvertently revealing, in his agitation, hidden depths and a secret taste for metaphysics.

'You could just be right, you know,' said the Admiral, making a note to keep an even closer eye on this dark horse. 'Perhaps philosophy is the answer. Tell them to up oars.'

Very reluctantly, the rowers were persuaded to desist whilst their Captain came to stand before them. He delayed a moment to achieve the mental downgrading to permit communication.

'It's like this,' he said when finally prepared for the contamination. 'We're being chased – us, chased! Us wot as faced the ships of Sultan Bayezid and put holes in the galleons of the Mamelukes! Now, tell me, is this right? Is it proper?'

He paused for dramatic effect. No one answered. Only from beneath the ship came the sound of urgent knocking.

The following day, Admiral Slovo woke to the more than usually sullen stares of the crew and knew straightaway that something had happened. He enquired as to the state of play from Bosun.

'As soon as we get too far for his fancy, he blocks our way and the crew put about, orders or no. We're going nowhere fast.'

'Ultimately, life is like that,' said Slovo sharply. 'As a philosopher, you should appreciate that.'

'And the look-out is gone.'

'Gone?'

'Sometime during the night and silent as you like. Only I should say, he's not entirely gone.'

'How so?'

'The Venetian left half the rib-cage behind.'

Slovo refused to be out-cooled. 'That was considerate of him,' he said. 'At least we're left in no doubt.' Then, quoting from *The Meditations*, he said, 'It is not the thing that disturbs thee, but thine own judgement about it.'

Bosun looked ruefully towards the rising sun. 'This is quite some "thing" we're facing here, Admiral,' he said. 'Do you reckon Look-out made his judgement of it before it got him?'

Hardback, £15.99

John Whitbourn's first fantasy novel, *A Dangerous Energy*, won the BBC Bookshelf First Fantasy Novel Competition, and is now available in VGSF at £4.99.

He lives in Surrey with his wife and children.

Flying Into Naples

Nicholas Royle

Flying into Naples the 737 hits some turbulence and gets thrown about a bit. It's dark outside but I can't even see any lights on the ground. I'm a nervous flyer anyway and this doesn't make me feel any better. It's taking off and landing that bother me.

But when we're down and I'm crossing the tarmac to the airport buildings there's a warm humid stillness in the air that makes me wonder about the turbulence. I wander through passport control and customs like someone in a dream. The officials seem covered in a fine layer of dust as if they've been standing there for years just waiting.

No one speaks to me and I get on the bus marked "Centro Napoli." I'm on holiday. All I've got in Naples is a name, a photograph and a wrong number. The name is a woman's – Flavia – and the photograph is of the view from her apartment. The phone number I tried last week to say I was coming turned out to belong to someone else entirely.

I've worked out from the photograph and my map that the apartment is on a hill on the west side of the city. There's not much more to go on. It's too late to go and look for it tonight. Flavia won't be expecting me – beyond occasional vague invitations nothing has been arranged – and she could take a long time to locate.

I knew her years ago when she visited London and stayed in the hotel where I was working the bar. We knew each other briefly – a holiday romance, if you like – but something ensured I would not forget her. Whether it was the sunrise we saw together or the shock of her body in the quiet shadow of my room over the kitchens, or a combination of these and other factors – her smile, my particular vulnerability, her tumbling curls – I don't know, but something fixed her in my mind. So when I found myself with a week's holiday at the end of three difficult months in a new, stressful job, I dug out her letters – two or three only over eight years, including this recent photograph of the view from her apartment – and booked a last-minute flight to Naples.

I'd never been there though I'd heard so much about it – how violent and dangerous it could be for foreigners, yet how beautiful – and I would enjoy the effort required to get along in Italian.

I'm alone on the bus apart from one other man – a local who spends the 20-minute ride talking on a cellphone to his mistress in Rome – and the taciturn driver. I've come before the start of the

season, but it's already warm enough not to need my linen jacket.

I'm divorced. I don't know about Flavia. She never mentioned anybody, just as she never revealed her address when she wrote to me. I've been divorced two years and a period of contented bachelorhood has only recently come to a natural end, and with the arrival of spring in London I have found myself watching women once again: following a hemline through the human traffic of Kensington, turning to see the face of a woman in Green Park whose hair looked so striking from behind. It may be spring in Berkeley Square but it feels like midsummer in Naples. The air is still and hot and humid when I leave the bus at the main railway station and begin walking into the centre of the city in search of a cheap hotel. I imagine I'm probably quite conspicuous in what must be one of the most dangerous areas but the hotels in the immediate vicinity – the pavement outside the Europa is clogged with upturned rubbish bins; the tall, dark, narrow Esedra looks as if it's about to topple sideways – look unwelcoming so I press on. It's late, after 10.30pm, and even the bars and restaurants are closed. Youths buzz past on Vespas and Piaggios unhelmeted despite the apparent dedication of the motorists here to the legend "live fast, die young." I hold my bag close and try to look confident but after 15 minutes or so the hotels have disappeared. I reach a large empty square and head deeper into the city. I ask a gun-holstered security guard if there is a pension in the neighbourhood but he shrugs and walks away. I climb a street that has lights burning but they turn out to be a late-night bar and a fruit stand. Two boys call to me from a doorway and as I don't understand I just carry on, but at the top is a barrier and beyond that a private apartment complex, so I have to turn back and the two boys are laughing as I walk past them.

I try in another direction but there are only banks and food stores, all locked up. Soon I realize I'm going to have to go back down to the area round the railway station. I cross the road to avoid the prostitutes on the corner of Via Seggio del Popolo, not because of any spurious moral judgment but just because it seems I should go out of my way to avoid trouble, so easy is it innocently to court disaster in a foreign country. But in crossing the road I walk into a problem. There's a young woman standing in a doorway whom in the darkness I had failed to see. She moves swiftly out of the doorway into my path and I gasp in surprise. The streetlamp throws the dark bruises around her eyes into even deeper perspective. Her eyes are sunken,

almost lost in her skull, and under her chin are the dark, tough bristles of a juvenile beard. She speaks quickly, demanding something and before I've collected my wits she's produced a glittering blade from her jacket pocket which she thrusts towards me like a torch at an animal. I react too slowly and feel a sudden hot scratch on my bare arm.

My jacket's over my other arm so I'm lucky that I don't drop it and give the woman the chance to strike again. She lunges but I'm away down the street running for my life. When it's clear she's not chasing me I stop for breath. One or two passers-by look at me with mild curiosity. I head back in the direction of the railway station. Down a side street on my right I recognize one of the hotels I saw earlier – the Esedra. Then I hadn't liked the look of it, but now it's my haven from the streets. I approach the glass doors and hesitate when I realize there are several men in the lobby. But the thought of the drugged-up woman makes me go on. So I push open the door and the men look up from their card game. I'm about to ask for a room when one of the men, who's had a good long look at me, says something to the man behind the little counter and this man reaches for a key from room 17's pigeon hole. I realize what's happening – they've mistaken me for someone who's already a guest – and there was a time when I would have been tempted to accept the key in the desire to save money, but these days I'm not short of cash. So, I hesitate only for a moment before saying that I'm looking for a room. The man is momentarily confused but gets me another key – room 19 – from a hook and quotes a price. It's cheap; the hotel is probably a haunt of prostitutes but right now I don't care. I just need a bed for the night.

"It's on the third floor," the man says. I pay him and walk up. There are lightbulbs but they're so heavily shaded the stairs are darker than the street outside. On each landing there are four doors: three bedrooms and one toilet cum shower. I unlock the door to room 19 and close it behind me.

I have a routine with hotel rooms: I lock myself in and switch on all the lights and open all the cupboards and drawers until I feel I know the room as well as I can. And I always check the window.

There are two single beds, some sticks of furniture, a bidet and a washbasin – I open the cold tap and clean up the scratch on my arm. The window is shuttered. I pull on the cord to raise the shutter. I'm overlooking the Corso Uberto I which runs up to the railway station. I step on to the tiny balcony and my hands get covered in dust from the wrought-iron railing. The cars in the street below are filmed with dust also. The winds blow sand here from the deserts of North Africa and it falls with the rain. I pull a chair on to the balcony and sit for a while thinking about Flavia. Somewhere in this city she's sitting watching television or eating in a restaurant and she doesn't know I'm here. Tomorrow I will try to find her.

I watch the road and I'm glad I'm no longer out there looking for shelter. Small knots of young men unravel on street corners and cross streets that don't need crossing. After a while I start to feel an uncomfortable solidity creeping into my limbs, so I take the chair back inside and drop the shutter. I'd prefer to leave it open but the open window might look like an invitation.

I'm lying in bed hoping that sleep will come but there's a scuttling, rustling noise keeping me awake. It's coming from the far side of the room near the washbasin and the framed print of the ancient city of Pompeii. It sounds like an insect, probably a cockroach. I'm not alarmed. I've shared hotel rooms with pests before, but I want to go to sleep. There's no use left in this day and I'm eager for the next one to begin.

Something else is bothering me: I want to go and try the door to room 17 and see why the proprietor was about to give me that key. The scratching noise is getting louder and although I can't fall asleep I'm getting more and more tired so that I start to imagine the insect. It's behind the picture where it's scratched out its own little hole and it's lying in wait for me to go and lift the picture aside and it will come at me, slow and deadly, like a Lancaster bomber. The noise works deeper into my head. The thing must have huge wings and antennae. Scratch...scratch...scratch. I can't stand it any more. I get up, pull on my trousers and leave the room.

The stairs are completely dark. I feel my way to the next landing and switch on the light in the WC to allow me to see the numbers on the doors. I push open the door to room 17, feeling a layer of dust beneath my fingertips, and it swings open. The chinks in the shutter admit enough light to paint a faint picture of a man lying on the bed who looks not unlike me. I step into the room and feel grit on the floor under my feet. As I step closer the man on the bed turns to look at me. His lips move slowly.

"I came straight here," he says, "instead of walking into the city to find something better."

I don't know what to say. Pulling up a chair I sit next to him.

"I found her," he continues. "She lives above the city on the west side. You can see Vesuvius from her window."

I grip his cold hand and try to read the expression on his face. But it's blank. The words rustle in his mouth like dry leaves caught between stones.

"She's not interested. Watch out for Vesuvius," he whispers, then falls silent. I sit there for a while watching his grey face for any sign of life but there's nothing. Feeling an unbearable sadness for which I can't reasonably account I return to my room and lie flat on my back on the little bed.

The unknown insect is still busy scratching behind the ruins of Pompeii.

I wake up to heavy traffic under my window, my head still thick with dreams. On my way downstairs I pause on the landing opposite room 17 and feel a tug. But I know the easiest thing is not to think too much about it and just carry on downstairs, hand in the key and leave the hotel for good. Even if I don't manage to locate Flavia I won't come back here. I'll find something better.

I walk across the city, stopping at a little bar for a cappuccino and a croissant. The air smells of coffee, cigarettes and laundry. Strings of clothes are hung out in the narrow passages like bunting. Moped riders duck their heads to avoid vests and socks as they bounce over the cobbles. Cars negotiate alleys barely wide enough to walk down, drivers jabbing at the horn to clear the way. Pedestrians step aside un-

hurriedly and there are no arguments or remonstrations.

The sun is beating down but there's a haze like sheer nylon stretched above the rooftops – dust in the air. I'm just heading west and climbing through distinct areas. The class differences show up clearly in the homes – the *bassi*, tiny rooms that open directly on to the street, and higher up the huge apartment blocks with their own gate and security – and in the shops and the goods sold in them. Only the dust is spread evenly.

As soon as I'm high enough to see Vesuvius behind me I take out the photograph and use it to direct my search, heading always west.

It takes a couple of hours to cross the city and locate the right street. I make sure it's the right view before starting to read the names on the bell-pushes. The building has to be on the left-hand side of the road because those on the right aren't high enough to have a view over those on the left. I still don't know if I'm going to find the name or not. Through the gaps between the buildings I can see Vesuvius on the other side of the bay. By looking ahead I'm even able to estimate the exact building, and it turns out I'm right. There's the name – F. Sannia – among a dozen others. I press the bell without thinking about it.

When Flavia comes to open the door I'm surprised. Perhaps it's more her place to be surprised than mine but she stands there with a vacant expression on her face. What a face, though, what extraordinary beauty. She was good looking when we first met, of course, but in the intervening years she has grown into a stunning woman. I fear to lean forward and kiss her cheeks lest she crumbles beneath my touch. But the look is blank. I don't know if she recognizes me. I say her name then my own and I must assume her acquiescence – as she turns back into the hall and hesitates momentarily – to be an invitation. So I follow her. She walks slowly but with the same lightness of step that I remember from before.

As I follow her into the apartment I'm drawn immediately to the far side of the main room where there's a balcony with a spectacular view over the Bay of Naples and, right in the centre at the back, Mount Vesuvius. Unaware of where Flavia has disappeared to, I stand there watching the view for some minutes. Naples is built on hills and one of them rises from the sea to dominate the left middle ground, stepped with huge crumbling apartment buildings and sliced up by tapering streets and alleys that dig deeper the narrower they become. The whole city hums like a hive and cars and scooters buzz about like drones. But the main attraction is Vesuvius. What a place to build a city: in the shadow of a volcano.

It's a while before I realize Flavia has returned and is standing behind me as I admire the view.

"What do you want to do while you are in Naples?" she asks with a level voice. "You'll stay here, of course."

"You're very kind. I meant to give you some notice but I don't think I had the right phone number." I show her the number in my book.

"I changed it," she says as she sits in one of the wicker chairs and indicates for me to do the same. "I've been widowed six times," she says and then falls silent. "It's easier."

I don't know what to say. I think she must have intended to say something else – made a mistake with her English – although she seems so grey and lifeless herself that the statement may well have been true.

We sit on her balcony for half an hour looking out over the city and the volcano on the far side of the bay, during which time I formulate several lines with which to start a fresh conversation but each one remains unspoken. Something in her passivity frightens me. It seems at odds with the élan of the city in which she lives.

But Flavia speaks first. "With this view," she says slowly, "it is impossible not to watch the volcano, to become obsessed by it."

I nod.

"My father was alive when it last erupted," she continues, "in 1944. Now Vesuvio is dormant. Do you want to see Naples?" she asks, turning towards me.

"Yes, very much."

We leave the apartment and Flavia leads the way to a beaten-up old Fiat Uno. Her driving is a revelation: once in the car and negotiating the hairpin, double-parked roads leading downtown Flavia is a completely different woman. Here is the lively, passionate girl I knew in London. She takes on other drivers with the determination and verve she showed in my room overlooking the hotel car park when we took it in turns to sit astride each other. She rode me then as she now drives the Fiat, throwing it into 180-degree corners and touching her foot to the floor on the straights. She's not wearing her seat belt; I unclip mine, wind down my window and put my foot up on the plastic moulding in front of me. At one point – when I draw my elbow into the car quickly to avoid a bus coming up on the other side of the road – Flavia turns her head and smiles at me just as she did eight years earlier before falling asleep.

We skid into a parking place and Flavia attacks the handbrake. Once out of the car she's quiet again, gliding along beside me. "Where are we going?" I ask her. Beyond the city the summit of Vesuvius is draped in thick grey cloud. Out over the sea on our right a heavy wedge of darkest grey thunderheads is making its way landwards trailing skirts of rain. In the space of two minutes the island of Capri is rubbed out as the storm passes over it and into the bay.

"She must want to be alone," Flavia says and, when I look puzzled, continues: "They say that you can see a woman reclining in the outline of the island."

But Capri is lost behind layers of grey veils now and just as Flavia finishes speaking the first drops of rain explode on my bare arms. Within seconds we are soaked by a downpour of big fat sweet-smelling summer rain. My thin shirt is plastered to my back. The rain runs off Flavia's still body in trickles. She seems impervious to the cleansing, refreshing effect that I'm enjoying. Dripping wet with rain bouncing off my forehead, I give her a smile but her expression doesn't change. "Shall we walk?" I suggest, eyeing some trees in the distance that would give us some shelter. She just turns and starts walking without a word so I follow. The trees – which I realize I have seen previously from Flavia's balcony – conceal the city aquarium, housed in the lower ground floor of a heavy stone building. I pay for two tickets and we pass in front of

a succession of gloomy windows on to another world. It's so damp down there I feel almost as if we've entered the element of the fishes. My shirt clings to my back, getting no drier under the dim lights. Flavia's white blouse is stuck to her shoulders but there's no tremor of life as far as I can see. She stares unseeing at the fish, the sinister skate and lugubrious octopus which regard us with an expression I feel but can't put a name to. Because I'm beginning to feel quite anxious I hurry past the shrimps and seahorses – which I see only as a blur of commas and question marks – and I'm relieved to get back into the open air.

Flavia takes me to a restaurant she knows and I eat cousins of the creatures we've just seen in the aquarium. Flavia orders mineral water and oysters but then hardly touches them. My teeth grind on tiny particles of grit or shell in my sauce but I don't say anything because it seems to be a city-wide problem. The waiter's black patent leather shoes are matt with a fine layer of dust.

I watch Flavia as I eat and she stares out of the window at the teeming rain. When she moves it's with an incredible slowness that sets up a tension in me. Her stillness makes me want to protect her. She must have suffered so much, like a tree that's been buffeted by so many storms it's been stripped of leaves and twigs, but still stands, proud and defiant. I want to reach across and touch her cheek in the hope she might soften and smile, but such a deliberate act seems reckless. The worst thing would be if she remained indifferent to my advance.

As I continue eating, however, I'm filled with desire for her. I want to take her to bed and hold her and stroke away the years with her thin layers of clothing.

The feeling grows throughout what remains of the day. We go to a couple of basement piano bars and a club where crowds of strikingly beautiful people spill out on to the street. The atmosphere of intoxication and sexual excitement does nothing to spark Flavia into life. She simply trails her fingers through the dust which seems to coat the tables in every bar we go in.

Only in the car does she come alive as we race from one venue to another, bouncing down noisy cobbled escape routes and diving into alleys thin as crevices. The car's headlamps startle cats and in one hidden piazza a huddle of unshaven men emerging from a fly-posted door. "This is a dangerous quarter," she says, pointing at streets I remember from my first night. "Camorro. Our Mafia. They kill you here as soon as look at you."

Way past midnight we end up in a park above the city on the same side as Flavia's apartment but further round the bay. "This newspaper," she indicates piles of discarded newsprint lining the side of the road. "People come here in their cars and put the newspaper up to cover the windows. Then they make love."

I look at the vast drifts of newspaper as we drive slowly around the perimeter of the park. "Why?" I ask. "Because they live at home? It's their only chance?"

She shrugs. "They do it in the cars then throw the newspaper out of the window."

"And what a view they have," I say, looking across the bay at the brooding shadow of Vesuvius.

Back home again she retreats inside her shell. The sudden change throws me. I want to touch her, sleep with her, but suddenly it's as if we're complete strangers. She sits on the balcony staring at Vesuvius and I bring her a drink. As I put it down I place my other hand on her arm and give it a brief squeeze. She doesn't react so I pull one of the wicker chairs round to face hers and sit in the darkness just watching her watch the volcano. The moon paints her face with a pale wash. I can see the shape of her breasts under the white blouse and as I concentrate I can see the merest lift as she breathes. Otherwise I might have doubted she was still alive. "Do you want to go to bed?" I ask.

She just looks at me. Inside me the tension is reaching bursting point. When Flavia gets up and walks to her bedroom I follow. She undresses in front of me. The moonlight makes her flesh look grey and very still. I undress and lie beside her. She doesn't push me away but neither does she encourage me in any way.

When I wake in the morning she's gone. The pillow on her side is still indented and warm to the touch. I wish I'd done something the night before but her terrible passivity killed my desire. A night's sleep, however, has returned it to me. If she were here now I'd force her to decide, whether to accept or reject me, either being preferable to indifference.

I get dressed and step out on to the balcony. The top of Vesuvius is covered with cloud. The air over the city is hazy. On the little table there's a note for me from Flavia. She's had to go out for the day and can I entertain myself? I'm to help myself to whatever I want. She suggests I visit Pompeii.

The Circumvesuviana railway trundles out of the east side of Naples and skirts the volcano, calling at St Giorgio and Ercolano, the sun beating down on the crumbling white apartment buildings. I avoid the modern town at Pompeii and head straight for the excavations. German tourists haggle over the entrance fee. I pay and go through, detaching myself from the crowd as soon as I can. They saunter off down the prescribed route armed with guide books from which their self-elected leader will read out loud, peculiarly choosing the English-language section, as they pass by the monuments of particular note. The same man – he's wearing a red shirt which bulges over the waistband of his creamy linen trousers – carries the camcorder and will listen impassively to anyone who suggests they operate it instead. They're a distraction from my surroundings: a city preserved to a far greater degree than anything I had been expecting. I wander off into an area of recent excavations where I'm alone with the buzzing insects and basking lizards that dart away at my approach. The heat is overpowering and after a quarter of an hour threading my way through dug-out paved streets bordered with shoulder-high walls and great swathes of overflowing undergrowth I have to sit down for a rest. I look up at Vesuvius, a huge black shape jiggling from side to side behind the thickening haze.

A bee the size of a fat cockroach lumbers towards me buzzing like a whole canful of blowflies and I have to duck to avoid it. Even when it's gone I can still hear it, as if I hadn't managed to get out of the way quick

enough and somehow it got inside my head. The sun, even through the dust in the air, amplifies the noise and cooks my skull so that everything inside it rattles like loose beans. Off down a long straight street to my right I recognize the party of German tourists standing to attention as they listen to the man in the red shirt with the stomach, the camcorder and the guide book. His words are just a low hum to me amid the constant buzz in my ears. My limbs tingle as if electricity is being passed through them, then they go completely numb and the buzzing gets slower and even louder. At the far end of the long straight street the Germans have frozen in position. The man in the red shirt is in the act of raising the camcorder to his eye, a woman in a wraparound top and shorts is caught in the act of leaning backwards – not ungracefully – to correct the fit of her smart training shoe. The air between them and me is thick with shiny dust, glittering in the golden sunshine. The tiny particles are dancing but the figures remain petrified.

Suddenly they're moving but in a group rather than individually. They are shifted silently to one side like a collection of statues on an invisible moving platform. It's as if they're being shunted into another world while I'm left dodging the insects in this one and I want to go with them. Maybe wherever they're going there won't be this terrible grinding noise which is giving the inside of my skull such a relentless battering.

By the time some feeling returns to my arms and legs the German tourists have completely disappeared. I stumble over the huge baking slabs, trying to escape the punishment. Pursuing the merest hint of a decrease in the noise level I turn in through an old stone doorway and begin a desperate chase after silence: over boulders, through tangles of nettles and vines where enormous butterflies make sluggish progress through the haze. As the pain levels out and then begins to abate I know I'm heading in the right direction. A couple more sharp turns past huge grass-covered mounds and collapsed walls where lizards the size of rats gulp at the gritty air; the noise fades right down, the pain ebbs and warm molten peaceful brassy sun flows into my bruised head. I fall to my knees with my hands covering my face and when I take them away I'm looking directly into the empty grey eyesockets of a petrified man. His face is contorted by the pain he felt as the lava flowed over him. I'm screaming because the man looks so much like me it's like looking in a mirror and a lizard suddenly flits out of one of the eyes and slips into the gaping mouth. The pain is back and this time it doesn't go away until I black out.

I'm out for hours because when I come to, rubbing my forehead, the sun casts quite different shadows on the stony face. Dismayingly I have to admit he still looks like me. For several minutes I sit and watch the insects that use his cavities and passages as they would any similar rock formation.

Later I tell Flavia how closely his volcanic features resembled mine.

"It's quite common to hallucinate after an eruption," she says, applying a piece of sticky tape to the newspaper covering the driver's window.

That's all very well, I think, but I'm 2000 years too

late. Or did she mean him? But I don't want to dwell on it because the faster the newspaper goes up the sooner I can have her.

It clicked with me that I could make the most of Flavia's carbound vivacity so that her passivity at home would not matter as much.

Through a narrow gap at the top of the windscreen I can see Vesuvius rising and falling as Flavia and I punish the old Fiat's suspension.

In a few hours' time I'll be climbing Vesuvius herself. Flavia's away somewhere – working, she said – so I'm to tackle the volcano alone and although I could have taken a cab to the tourist car park halfway up the mountain I decided to walk all the way from Ercolano which, as Herculaneum, was itself covered by the same lava flows that buried Pompeii. The road folds over on itself as I climb. The routine is soon automatic as I maintain a regular ascent and efficient breathing. My mind is rerunning the night before in Flavia's car. Six times her emotions reached bursting point and boiled over. In the early hours the air in the car was so thick and cloying we had to wind down the window, which meant losing part of our newsprint screen, but the park had emptied hours before.

In her apartment, where I swallowed glass after glass of fresh orange juice, Flavia was once more still and grey. I was thinking about getting her out in the car again but I knew I had to climb the volcano before I left: it had been calling me and this was my last day in the city.

If the air were not so thick with dust, the view from halfway up the mountain would be spectacular. I can just make out a darker shadow which is the centre of Naples and a thin line separating the land from the sea. Only the island of Capri is clear in the distance but its profile is still no more like a woman than the trembling slope beneath my feet. Down here there are trees either side of the road but I can see that higher up the ground is bare. The sun still manages to break through the thickening air and once caught between the ground and the dust the heat cannot escape. I've taken off my shirt and tied it around my neck to soak up some of the sweat. The mountain seems to get no smaller even though I know I'm climbing. The road hugs the side and disappears some way round the back before twisting back on itself to reach the car park and refreshment stand. I have the sense, the higher I get, of the volcano as an egg, its exterior thin and brittle and cracked open at the top. I stop for breath, lean back and stretch. The summit and crater are covered by cloud.

Beyond the empty car park the narrow path zig-zags into the clouds. I climb with the same sense of purpose that took hold of Flavia and me in the car and I sense that the prize is not so far removed from that sweet and fiery memory which even now stirs me. The earth and trees have been left behind and the slate-grey cloud thickens about me like hospital blankets. The mountain is loose cinders and disintegrated volcanic material, a uniform grey-brown, like a dying horse in a burnt field. I'm suddenly engulfed by a wave of sympathy for Flavia and the years of suffering. They have turned her into a brittle shell, but life lingers within her, a dormant energy that last night we fired up. She deserves longer-lasting happiness and yet I know she wouldn't even flicker in some other

city; Naples is her only home. Some things are rooted too deeply in the earth to shift.

Never in my life have I felt so alone as I feel now, wrapped in cloud, buffeted by sea winds, following a path to a crater. I can't see more than ten barren yards in any direction.

When I hear the music I think I've died or am still asleep in Flavia's bed and dreaming. Soft notes that gather a little power then fade quickly as the wind blows new ones slightly up or down the scale. I've already called Flavia's name three times before I realize I'm doing it. The name is taken from my lips and wrapped in this soiled cotton wool that surrounds me. Her name rolls on with the cloud over the top of the mountain where the crater must be. It mustn't fall in.

The source of the music comes into view – an abandoned shack supported by an exoskeleton of tubular steel shafts. The wind plays them like panpipes. A sign still attached to the side of the shack advertises the sale of tickets to the crater. I begin to laugh at the absurdity of such an idea and wade on past the chiming tubes and up towards the edge. I know it's up there somewhere although I can't see it and I stumble blindly onwards, scuffing my shoes in coarse, loose material. Then suddenly the ground disappears beneath my feet and I'm clawing at space for a handhold. Somehow I manage to fall back rather than forward and I crouch in the harsh volcanic rubble peering over the edge of the crater. Below me the cloud twists in draughts of warm air. I'm muttering Flavia's

name to myself and thinking I should never have gone to look for her. Then I'm thinking maybe I never did go, but stayed in the insect-ridden hotel instead.

As I watch the updraughts of ash and dust I see a recognizable group of shapes take vague form in the clouds. The German tourists – he with the red shirt, the camcorder, the stomach, she of the shorts and smart training shoes, still frozen as an exhibit of statuary – descend through the rising dust as if on a platform. The thicker swirls beneath me envelop them.

They pass into the throat of the giant and are followed by a facsimile of Flavia, falling like a slow bomb. A cast of myself – whether from Pompeii or the hotel, I don't know – is next, slipping in and out of focus behind curtains of clogging ash.

The last thing I remember is the buffeting and turbulence the 737 went through as it passed over Vesuvius on its descent into Naples, and suddenly the whole crazy city with its strange visions and coating of fine dust – from a waiter's shoes to the air rattling in lungs – makes perfect sense.

Nicholas Royle has contributed at least five stories to *Interzone* in the past, beginning with "The Sculptor's Hand" (issue 32). His first novel is just out from Barrington Books (for more details, see the interview with him which begins on page 48) and he has also edited two original anthologies in the "Darklands" series.

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Ansible Link

David Langford



Resemblances between one published work and another make for a perpetual source of sf gossip and—in a very few extreme cases—litigation. When Whitley Strieber recycled the entire story of my 1979 UFO spoof in a few pages of his novel *Majestic*, it was decided that he had acted in good faith (thinking it a public domain anecdote) and that was that.

The persistent rumours about similarities between Harry Adam Knight's 1984 *Carnosaur* and Michael Crichton's 1990 *Jurassic Park* are perhaps inevitable. Once an author decides to write about genetically engineered dinosaur recreations which run amok, certain scenes do automatically tend to follow (e.g. a major character devoured alive by tiny dinosaurs). One of the oddest coincidences—gleefully pointed out by John Brosnan, our greatest living authority on the HAK work—is the sequence in Spielberg's movie where a charging dinosaur crashes into this display of a fossilized dinosaur skeleton...which resembles a scene found in *Carnosaur* but not in the Crichton novel.

A brand-new focus of scurrilous sf gossip is William James's "Sunfall" trilogy, all about Mongol hordes on a far world and comprising *The Earth is the Lord's*, *The Other Side of Heaven* and *Before the Sun Falls* (only the first two published by Orbit at the time of writing). Scattered at intervals throughout the books are fragments of dialogue and action which clearly echo Cecilia Holland's 1969 historical novel of Mongol hordes, *Until the Sun Falls*. An unfortunate though inadvertent trick of the author's memory, a conscious homage, or what? There are mysteries of the Universe with which Man should not meddle...

Night's Black Agents

Michael Bishop credits me with awe-some powers: "No one in your country will buy *Count Geiger's Blues*. Are you responsible?" No, never, perish the thought.

John Brunner bewails his diminished circumstances and lack of writing commissions, and is now seriously contemplating a move from the famous South Petherton mansion "where I hoped to spend my remaining

days" to somewhere cheap in a city.

Pat Cadigan, voice of moderation, supplies us with another soundbite: "Nobody tells me I can't puke on a few fans if I want to!"

Ellen Datlow of *Omni*, whom I always imagined as sprawling on a golden throne while her fiction slushpile was sifted by gangs of toiling sycophants, complains: "My assistant Rob Killheffer has been promoted to associate editor of nonfiction and I'm not getting a new assistant...Right now I have a free intern reading slush but she leaves the end of August. They always do this to me whenever I lose an assistant: 'You don't really want someone to read all the slush, do you?'"

Stephen Marley was bemused to discover, on the "by the same author" page of his *Mortal Mask*, that his novel about the Madonna is called *The Life of the Virgin Marley*.

Chris Priest escaped national fame in July: "For the fiftieth year running, *The Guardian* neglected to note my birthday..."

David Wingrove reports: "I actually went to China for the first time last month—courtesy of *YOU* magazine (they're running an article on the trip 5th Sept)—and loved it. It was genuinely like being on an alien planet...all those X's and Z's in the names, and Dongs and Wangs everywhere you looked."

Roger Woddis the poet and parodist died in July aged 76: sf fans will remember his *Prisoner* script, *Hammer into Anvil*.

Infinitely Improbable

Bram Stoker Award: the annual prize for best horror novel (which for some reason is shaped like a little house with the winner's name hidden inside the hinged front door) went to Thomas Monteleone's *Blood of the Lamb*.

Gateway to Nowhere. Remember *The Gate*? Spies report that issue 4 of this long-silent British sf magazine has been typeset and ready to go for years, merely awaiting money to print the thing. Publisher Richard Newcombe is still paying off past contributors, a dwindling bit at a time, while surrounded by dusty manuscripts yet to be paid for, scheduled, rejected or

returned. The saga of bad luck apparently began with poor advice on marketing, leading to thousands of unsold spare copies of issue 1...

Electronic Skiffy. It's a world first: an instant CD-ROM anthology of 1993 Hugo/Nebula award nominations which may be the hugest sf collection ever ("Gosh," evil-minded fans remarked, "a publishing format that might make *The Last Dangerous Visions* almost feasible!"). All the Hugo-nominated fiction is there, even novels, plus a vast mass of hitherto unpublished Vernor Vinge annotations on his *A Fire Upon the Deep*. Additional Nebula stuff comprises the shorter categories only, with two novelettes including James Morrow's winning "City of Truth" password-protected in a manner which, as I understand the disc's *Apologies For Hideous Bugs* notes, means you can read them only on a Macintosh. Art, fan and nonfiction material is represented with varying spottiness. The voluminous "bonus" text ranges from mildly interesting (a *New York Review of SF* index) to unreadable (vast wedges of sf computer-net chitchat). Of format horrors like vanishing double-quotes, em dashes and indentation, let us not speak: seemingly all this is ascribable to wonky software from an obscure cowboy outfit called Microsoft. A hastily corrected edition should have appeared by now. (ClariNet Communications Corp. \$29.95, for Macintosh and IBM/Windows.)

Science Corner. Millennium's very wonderful newsletter *Antivity* reports: "Up to fifteen per cent of the mass of all land animals is made up of ants." Answers on a postcard to *Antivity*: precisely which 15% of its editors Deborah Beale & Charon Wood is...?

Alternate History. I was not aware that I had ever painted Zsa Zsa Gabor's face, let alone Pee Wee Herman's, but *Fangoria* magazine never lies and hidden hands at *The New York Review of SF* eagerly passed on a (somewhat vomitous) "Spotlight on Success" ad feature informing me that "David Langford graduated from the Joe Blasco Makeup Artist Training Center in 1980 and..." no, no, it's too painful. I can't go on.

Toy Cars, Teaspoons and Scissors

Nicholas Royle interviewed by Chris Kenworthy

Nicholas Royle drove up from London in his black Mini for this interview. I couldn't help but think about the stories I've read where he has car trouble. It was almost pleasant to know that he had broken down on the way, and then struggled to find my house. I've met him before, and he's a cheerful character who talks with intensity and precision.

He quickly dispelled the rumour that he rose up through the ranks of the small press. His first sales were to the *Pan Books of Horror Stories* and Dennis Etchison's anthology *Cutting Edge*, and he continued to make professional sales for some time. He was excited when he discovered the small press; he simply hadn't known that it existed, and the idea that people could get together to pass on their new writing appealed to him. He quickly became known as a regular in many of the small-press magazines.

His involvement with the small press increased when he edited and published *Darklands*, an anthology of new horror writing. Despite Nick's enthusiasm for non-commercial and challenging stories, *Darklands* received widespread acclaim and won the British Fantasy Award for best anthology. *Darklands 2* followed soon after, and received similar acclaim. Although he has now sold *Darklands* to New English Library for reprint, and may continue to edit for them, he is keen not to become better known as a good anthologist than as a good writer. His interest remains with the writing of short stories and novels. I asked him how it all began.

"I'd wanted to write for a long time before I started, never getting beyond chapter one of a novel. The breakthrough came in an unexpected way in 1983. I was writing a letter to a friend, trying to describe the bar I was working in, and it turned into a story; I'd created a character slightly different to myself, in a bar slightly different to the real one." Even in his first story, there was a dislocation, a movement away from the normal, which has been present in all his work.

"I'm still quite fond of 'The Barman.' It sold to *Jennings Magazine* five years after it was written, after many rejections. Fifteen terrible stories were produced in the meantime, and some

managed to sell over those years, but then my work started to improve." The dislocations continued, and he began to work in the genres of horror, fantasy and science fiction. I asked him if he now considers himself to be a horror writer.

"Some people consider me a horror writer, and I'm happy with that. Problems arise when I write something that doesn't fit. 'The Cast' in *Interzone*, one of my favourites, is a good example. Someone wrote into *Interzone* and demanded 'no more boring horror stories.' I was pleased at the reaction, because reaction is always good, but I was confused because I didn't consider it to be a horror story. Maybe it's because it was in *Interzone*, and that's what it was expected to be, simply because it wasn't science fiction."

Nick Royle has a distinctive style and mood, and he uses his techniques of dislocation and altered reality to convey his chosen themes and emotions. Whether it is called horror or fantasy becomes almost irrelevant, although the work could certainly come under the more general banner of "slipstream": it is based on the genres, but is not exactly of them. It takes the strong points of genre fiction, and builds on them, without being weighed down by the excesses that spoil so much genre work.

"If I say I'm a mainstream writer, it implies I think I'm above the horror genre, but I don't. There's nothing wrong with being called a horror writer, except that there are so many writers who let the genre down by writing utter rubbish (and selling huge quantities of books). Like any genre, most of it is rubbish, some of it is good."

I often wonder why writers find dislocation a useful tool, and ask Nick why he found himself outside of mainstream writing.

"I'm not interested in just sitting there and writing a straight account of what happened to three characters, and how their lives affected each other. I'm interested in finding some more imaginative way of representing what happened. Horror, sf and fantasy offer so much rich opportunity for metaphor and imagery. They can be used to write about the same concerns as mainstream fiction, in a more

imaginative way. Some of my stories, 'The Cast' again is a good example, start off in what appears to be the real world, and suddenly you introduce something that seems quite strange. In that story the narrator acted as though that was a normal part of this world."

I suggest that the familiarity is something which everybody can connect with and then, when that suddenly starts breaking down, you are taken along with the process more easily than if it had begun with immediate horror. It's more connected to our own experience.

"I can only agree with that. This is right at the heart of my writing; this dislocation from reality, moving from the familiar to the strange."

Reviewers often recognize the autobiographical elements in his stories, but readers sometimes take this further. Some people believe that Nicholas is recounting true events from his life. "The Mainstream," which relates a weird and frightening motorway journey, was believed by myself and others, to be a true account.

"Whenever I write something that is based on a true incident, maybe the first few pages are autobiographical, after which there's generally a lot of exaggeration; I take the idea of what happened, and discover what *could* happen from what did happen. 'The Mainstream' is true, up to a point. There was a journey from Leeds to London, which took all night; it was almost as nightmarish as in the story. I went to incredible trouble to get to work, and arrived half an hour late, and they just said 'You needn't have bothered coming in.' I thought, 'Thanks, next time I'll not bother.' I can't remember if I really was followed that night, or if I invented all of that. There are some very strange people hanging round service stations at night, who perhaps live there, or just go at night. They did leave their fingerprints on the back window. Some bits of that story might be too personal; perhaps the dislocation should have been greater. I don't always write autobiographically, but in that story, the car did break down that many times, and there was a thick fog. The fog was lifting, and blue sky came; it felt like the nightmare was over, but then it wasn't of course..."

That story was one of his most popular, and like much of his work, involved a car journey. He is horribly afraid of road-traffic accidents, and recounts several stories involving head-on collisions, swapping carriageways and instant deaths.

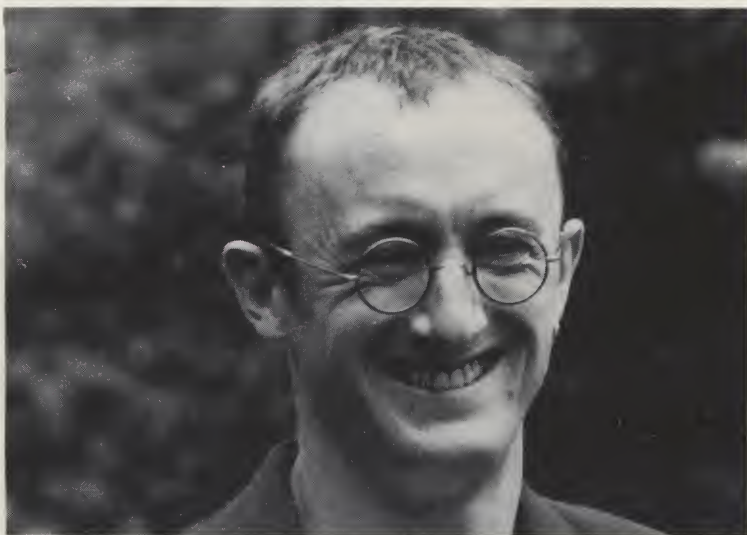
"It's quite a frightening thing, being at the wheel of a car. People take it for granted." He glances out of the window at his Mini, and decides that he doesn't want to be known as "the one who writes those car stories." It is perhaps unfair to think of him this way, and although he has used the travel imagery well, he can move far beyond it, as many of his short stories have shown.

"I think a good short story can be a perfect thing. Its brevity can help it reach that perfection. I get ideas for short stories which couldn't be expanded to novels, and if you tried to expand them, they would fail. A successful story usually comes from two ideas colliding. Ideas from six months ago can meet a new idea, and it's like a chemical reaction taking place, you get something completely new. It's so satisfying when that happens. The idea can sit in the folder on the Mac for ages; it's not that good on its own, but when it meets the new idea, something is sparked off."

After a long struggle, Nick's first novel, *Counterparts*, has now been published. It is a complex story, detailing a nightmare journey (metaphorically and physically – on trains this time, though). The themes are strong and worthwhile, tackling the difficulties that arise from obsessive love and past emotions. Considering his success with short stories (he's sold over sixty) I ask why he has moved on to novels. He is keen to show that it was for a valid reason, rather than the standard writer's wish to write novels above all else, just because it's the done thing.

"Before I started writing, I dreamed of writing and selling a short story. Once I'd done that I wanted to do the same with a novel. I'd looked at good novels, and thought it was incredible that someone could have sat down and written this. I was filled with excitement by the idea. When I was suddenly presented with 200 blank pages I was terrified, and was convinced I would never fill them. Before I wrote *Counterparts*, I couldn't imagine I would ever do so. I wasn't even considering selling it, or it being any good. I had to get rid of the idea of blank pages. It's as long as it is. When it's half a page long, it's just half a page, and you have to forget those blank pages. Lots of ideas came together, quite naturally. I'd been waiting for the right kind of ideas."

Once he found the starting point, was it easy to write *Counterparts*?



Nicholas Royle

"It was exciting because it changed so much as I was writing, and new ideas came in. You can reach a certain point where two ideas which had been running along concurrently come together and meet, and you know that will add a new layer. That happened all the time through *Counterparts*, taking it a long way from my original plan. If I'd written strictly to a synopsis it would have been a lot of boring work. It was fun to write."

Counterparts was begun in 1987, and the initial draft was finished a year later. He wrote it in several restaurants and pubs, and while travelling around. He worked in the evenings and at weekends, while holding down a full-time job. Much of the action takes place in Eastern Europe. In 1989, long after the initial draft was completed,

a problem arose. The Berlin Wall came down.

"Here's my novel about Eastern Europe and now suddenly the governments have toppled! It required a lot of rewriting. Originally, I was fascinated by Eastern Europe, that governments would not allow people to leave. They could move around the bloc, but not leave. Such a strange idea. I travelled a lot around Europe, through the countries covered in the book." Towards the end of *Counterparts*, it is clear that he was there, because the details are so precise. It can only be hoped that his journey did not fall into the same confusion and terror that Gargan experiences in the novel.

So why, specifically, the image of the Berlin Wall? "Well, it was fascinating that there should actually be this

THE PRIZE-WINNING ANTHOLOGY
OF NEW BRITISH HORROR WRITING,
EDITED BY NICHOLAS ROYLE
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
RAMSEY CAMPBELL

DARKLANDS

'Extremely disturbing ...
an excellent collection'
The Times

physical manifestation of the idea of containment; a thirteen-foot-high concrete wall. If you stood up in Parliament and said, 'Let's build a wall to stop our people getting out,' everyone would laugh. And yet it existed for so long. It was interesting because it went through Berlin, a city that was stuck in East Germany. That bisection, and the eventual duplication, is central to *Counterparts*; it is echoed by Gargan's tightrope walking and the cuts he inflicts on himself. It also ties up with the idea that when you're here, you want to be there. And when you're there, you want to be back here. When it's winter, you want it to be summer, and in summer you occasionally want it to be winter again. Everybody feels this duality. Those on the East side of the wall would think the West was

better, while those on the West would want to take a look on the other side. So I did."

The book doesn't read academically, it is just too interesting and exciting for that, but it is clear that the background information has been well researched.

"The acting stuff is largely autobiographical, from my time in Paris. Ed and Dick were real people, and I was working as a language teacher, like the character Adam Midwinter." I was surprised by this, because although the scenes are convincing, they are not weighed down by their personal nature. They read clearly, and add a balance of humour to the book.

"I did a lot of academic research for the Aboriginal background, having

been fascinated with that culture for some time. I found films like *Walkabout* and *The Last Wave* very frightening, partly because of this importance that Aborigines place on dreams. Everything that happens in dreams is as important to them, if not more so, than what happens in the waking world." This is why the dream images are so successful in *Counterparts*; they aren't thrown in merely for effect, or to add some weirdness, but they back up the central themes, and show the worsening experience of the characters in a direct way.

Nick works freelance for *Time Out* magazine, and he plays on their football team. His strange reluctance to shower after the game has led to rumours that he has something to hide down there. Considering the mutilation and piercing scenes in *Counterparts*, it is little wonder that people have begun to spread rumours. "The piercing isn't autobiographical," he insists. "I saw a magazine once, at someone's house, with a picture in it that I found so shocking that it stayed with me for years; a man's penis cut in half. I got hold of it years later, by phoning the publishers in California. It arrived in a brown envelope. I've still got it. It almost certainly broke the law coming into the country. But I didn't go to any piercing parties. It's funny," he reflects, "there are more people walking round these days with pierced noses and eyebrows and bottom lips; it's becoming socially acceptable, there's a lot more of it now." I notice that, although he rejects the notion of the more exotic piercing found in *Counterparts*, his left ear is shot through with a simple, shining ring.

Some of the most convincing scenes in the book involve precarious tightrope walking, above London. I was convinced that this must be another of Nick's bizarre hobbies. "I knew a tightrope walker who lived in a squat, in Vauxhall. I never saw his tightrope, but I talked to him about it." He seems pleased that I've been convinced by those sections. Apparently, somebody else who read the book had a phobia for heights, and she found those scenes upsetting. I don't have the phobia, officially, but I know what she meant.

Counterparts has already received widespread acclaim from the horror community. Ramsey Campbell has described the book as, "So individual and ambitious as to be virtually unclassifiable." *Counterparts* looks set to receive strong critical acclaim. I wondered if this surprises him, as there could be a prejudice against horror writers.

"A lot of people think that if it's horror, it's going to be crap. Sometimes they are wrong. There are some brilliant horror novels, and there are some brilliant novels which could be called

horror, even if they're not marketed that way. There is a prejudice against horror writers, because of the crap that's around. Maybe *Counterparts* isn't really a horror novel, and that's why it took so long to sell it to a publisher; the horror publishers said it wasn't straightforward enough, while mainstream editors said it was too horrific and strange." It is heartwarming to see that, despite pressure from some publishers, he didn't rewrite the book to a commercial compromise.

"I'll be interested to see what people think it is. Horror fans may read it and be delighted. For instance, Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* wasn't marketed as a horror novel, but lots of horror fans loved it, and Banks became part of the horror and sf community. His sf novels then sold with ease, even though they'd been written beforehand. *The Wasp Factory* was his fifth book, and he sold it on his 30th birthday, which is when I sold *Counterparts*."

I offer my opinion that there seem to be two main ways of creating a sense of horror; through violence, and through the feeling of nightmare, and ask which he was aiming for in the novel.

"I'm not interested in creating horror out of violence; it's easy to disgust people, lots of people make a fortune doing that. It's more difficult to use violence responsibly, which disturbs you on a deeper and more essential level than simple disgust. Most of the book, and most of my horror writing, is concerned with the nightmare atmosphere. As a small boy I used to differentiate between dreams and nightmares; if I could describe why it was frightening, it was just a dream. But if I woke up with this absolute terror, and the things I tried to describe were just nonsense, then it was a nightmare." This comes across in his fiction. Although the words make sense, you often can't tell what it is that terrifies you. Somehow, subtly, he creates this unease which turns to terror and you are left shaking.

"There were no people in my nightmares, just things and feelings. It wasn't the falling sensation which a lot of people experience. It was a vast, dark suffocation. And yet the most frightening things, they sound so silly," he clutches his forehead, almost too embarrassed to tell me. "The suffocation, me becoming tinier, and there was a toy car, a Matchbox Superfast car, and a teaspoon. The combination was the most terrifying feeling I have known. It can't be communicated directly, but you can find ways to convey feeling." He wrote a story about this nightmare but it didn't work. The key, he realized, was to recreate the feelings through common experience, rather than through his own experience, which was just too abstract for

the rest of us. A toy car and a teaspoon!

The predominant feeling in *Counterparts* is one of nightmare, but running through this is a vein of terrible self-inflicted violence. Gargan, in his sleep, mutilates himself with a razor blade. Unlike much horror writing, I felt that this gave responsibility to the character, rather than having him as a mere victim of some unknown, pure evil.

"*Counterparts* is really all about responsibility. Gargan is mutilating himself, but he's doing it in his sleep; the reasons aren't clear. Even he doesn't know, which suggests that he could be a victim, but what is he a victim of? There are many aspects of his background that could account for it, but it takes time to work it out. He could be the victim of his parentage, or of past incidents. He's not a pure victim; he is to some extent because it happens in his sleep, but it's still himself that's doing it. The book is about finding out why."

He talks then of guilt, and the way emotions can be off-loaded onto those who are not responsible. "It feels the same, the effect is the same, whether you are guilty or not."

There is humour in *Counterparts*, lots of it. "It wasn't a conscious decision, but I feel there is balance between the scenes. Writing is drawn from life, and there's always something funny about life."

Nicholas Royle's life has been patterned with dreams, dramas and incidents. He recounts stories of times when he fell asleep mid-conversation, leaving the person on the other end of the phone in a state of panic. He once held a rational and interesting conversation while completely asleep, and has no memory of it. These incidents led him to worry about the effect that writing *Counterparts* might have on him.

"I wasn't as stressed out as you might think while writing it, but I did have to lock my very sharp Wilksinson Sword scissors in a briefcase with a combination lock, and I had to spin the combinations out of recognition, because life and art do imitate each other. That was frightening. The day after I finished the book, I liberated the scissors. But they are still tucked away at the back of the drawer. I'm still slightly nervous."

Perhaps he always will be.

Nicholas Royle's first novel, *Counterparts*, is available for £4.99 (post free), from Barington Books, Bartle Hall, Liverpool Road, Hutton, Preston, Lancs, PR4 5HB.

Interzone

Some back-issue highlights:

No.29: "Sex Wars" issue; stories by Greg Egan, Karen Joy Fowler, Garry Kilworth, etc.

No.32: Richard Calder's debut, "Mosquito," plus fiction by Barry Bayley, Ian McDonald

No.34: All new writers' issue, illustrated throughout by Ian Miller

No.36: Kim Newman's "Original Dr Shade" plus stories by Greg Egan, Simon Ings & others

No.38: Brian Aldiss issue, with interview by Colin Greenland, plus Greg Bear, etc.

No.42: All-female issue, with Pat Murphy, Lisa Tuttle, illustrated by Judith Clute

No.43: "In the Air," Newman & Byrne's first USSA story, plus Langford, Jeapes, etc.

No.48: All-star "Aboriginal" swap issue, with Brown, Egan, Griffith, McAuley, etc.

No.50: Stephen Baxter, Ian Lee & others, plus full index of first fifty issues

No.53: Fiction by Christopher Evans, Ian R. MacLeod; Jonathan Carroll interview

No.56: Ian Watson's "Coming of Vertumnus" plus Ballard, Di Filippo, Mapes, Webb, etc.

No.58: Our tenth anniversary issue, with Ballard, Storm Constantine, M. John Harrison

No.60: Fantasy issue, with Garry Kilworth's "The Sculptor"; Donaldson interview and more

No.63: David Garnett, Diane Mapes, Ian Watson; Greenland & Sheekley interviews

No.66: Eugene Byrne's "Cyril the Cyberpig" plus Elizabeth Hand, John Sladek, etc.

No.67: Bob Shaw issue, with stories by Baxter, Blanchard, Harrison & Ings

No.70: Molly Brown, Keith Brooke, Nicola Griffith, Brian Stableford and others

All these issues are still in stock.



THE APPRENTICE

Young Guran Svenberg, in cycle clips and baggy trousers billowing with air, strains to pedal uphill, before dismounting and pushing his bicycle the last 30 yards to the crown of the rise. There he stops, leans on his bike and surveys the broad sweep of the Hope Valley, the villages of Hathersage, Hope and Castleton blossoming on the green floor of the broad valley like a species of white flower sprung from a giant's footsteps after a night of rain. For we are in the English Peak District under the humped back of the Pennines. It is the summer of 1944.

The skies overhead are brilliant blue, and less pocked with aircraft these days. The spine of the Axis demon has been broken, and we are in the post-climactic nervous optimism which followed the D-day invasions of Normandy. It's now more than three and a half years since Svenberg, then only 14, stood on this very hill under an October sunlight so bright it dripped from golden leaves and leaked from the trunks of silver birches, shading his eyes to watch a Spitfire harry a Heinkel jet from the lavender sky and bring it down somewhere beyond the limestone out-

crop of the valley sides. That was just one of the 1,733 aircraft lost by the Luftwaffe in the run-up to the Battle of Britain, and Svenberg still thought that his father had made a mistake in leaving Sweden and coming to the wrong side.

"After this war," his father had said to him as they prepared to leave Stockholm, "if there's anything left of the world that is, the world will be speaking either English or German."

"What if it's German?" the boy Guran had asked, seeing no reason why they should flee Sweden.

"If that happens, well, *das ist eine gross witz, jah?*"

Guran, whose schooling had equipped him with German but not with English, didn't see how it would be a good joke at all.

His father Thomas Svenberg, Anglophile, liberal and academic historian at the University of Uppsala, had left Sweden in protest at the country's neutrality and some would say complicity with the German invasion of Norway following the Allied declaration of war. His principled stand met with sympathy from many colleagues, but not with similar action. They



had families, they pointed out, whereas with his wife dead these five years he only had the boy Guran to think about; and anyway running away from a neutral country to a nation at war seemed a dumb thing to do.

"There is no neutrality," Thomas had raged on more than one occasion, "no impartial position, no aloofness, no independence from your humanity. Every German so-called hospital truck which rolls through Sweden compromises us; and every day that we come in to work as if everything were normal puts us on the side of the Nazis. There is no such thing as neutrality, and don't you forget it!"

But they did forget it, very easily, and a dismayed Thomas made a histrionic performance of tearing up his contract in the senior common room. He found a route to England and took the boy Guran with him. The first thing he did when he arrived in London was to offer his services to the War Office. Wasn't he a cryptographer practically by trade? That is, he had done a lot of groundbreaking archeological work deciphering ancient script. Why, only his sudden departure from Sweden had broken the development

of radical theory, flying in the face of tradition, that Linear B tablets were in fact Greek and not Minoan at all, a theory that was to be proved correct years later, much to his chagrin over the sacrifice of a career. Surely the British would know of his work. He could serve as a wartime codebreaker or cryptographer, couldn't he? Surely the British would find a use for his exceptional and undisputed talents.

The War Office received his submission with interest, but they rejected him. They were very nice about it; the British are like that. They even sent a young bureaucrat around to see him, who pointed out that the issue was confused by Swedish "co-operation" with the Nazis, meaning that they would never know if he were working for the Germans, would they? Surely he could see that. They told him that he was being put on ice, that they could possibly foresee a time when they would call upon his talents, and that he was to be paid a retainer. Admittedly meagre, said the young bureaucrat with a twitching smile. Meanwhile they recommended that he take up residence in some area of the country which was neither industrially

nor militarily sensitive, like the Peak District for example. Papers were arranged, and his movements were "voluntarily" circumscribed.

Thomas Svenberg was devastated. He had exiled himself to join the fight against Fascism, and here he was being treated by the British as a potential spy. Didn't they recognize the sacrifices he had made? The career he had abandoned? What was he expected to do, fester in the English countryside until the war was over? While he pretended to accept gracefully his "on ice" status he knew that he had been rejected out of hand. Meanwhile the young Guran felt all of his father's humiliations, and began to cultivate a serious dislike of the British.

And the first days were not easy. Blonde, blue-eyed Aryan types, neither of whom could seem to force the tongue far enough between the teeth and the lips to effect a decent *th* and shake off the shibboleth of the foreigner to this queer island, they were often treated with suspicion and hostility. Always there was something to torment them: a tousel of Boy Scouts high as kites on Baden-Powell propaganda movies about the enemy within, thrilled to report their presence to a police already detailed to watch them anyway; or village sub-postmistresses ready to will into being the local existence of fifth columnists, cheerfully selling them pencils and stamps before picking up the telephone the moment they'd left the shop.

In the early days their papers were checked so frequently it became a standing joke. Guran's father worked hard on devising code systems and ciphers, posting them off to the War Office address he had been given in London. He always received polite replies thanking him for his efforts, but not once did they ask him to break into enemy codes, and he had no way of knowing if his contributions ever saw the light – or dark – of an operational day. Guran saw his father becoming more and more depressed, isolated, morose, given to taking long solitary walks in the exposed hills and quiet dales of the Peaks.

Guran himself came to feel rejected on all sides. Perhaps that's why when the moment came he was so susceptible to the influence of Sir Royston Cox; but that was later. Meanwhile the language came quickly to him. He and his father lived quietly in a damp cottage near the village of Hope. He cycled the seven-mile journey to school every day and learned how to say with accent, "nowt ever 'appens in 'ope." It was a dolorous North Derbyshire bid for humour.

In lieu of other entertainment he was given, like his father, to solitary exploration of the Peak District, but by bicycle. He spoke to no one while on these cycling expeditions, and learned to avoid routes that might take him past big-breasted English land-army girls lunching in chattering groups between the road and some fivebar gate. They were merciless. "Hey Blondie, hey Snowie! Stop yer bike and give us a crossbar into 'ope!" Raucous female laughter had him blushing a shade of beet that only seemed to exaggerate the whiteness of his hair. "Hey Snowie, show us yer dynamo! Hey Blondie!"

This time Guran pointed his bicycle down the hill away from the valley, felt in his pocket for the sheets of folded foolscap, and abandoned himself to the pleasure of the freewheel drop running for two miles before having to push a pedal again to climb out of it.

It was a good distance to Cox's rambling Georgian mansion near Bakewell. On this day Cox was expecting him for tea and sandwiches.

It was on one of these solitary cycling expeditions that Guran had first met Sir Royston Cox. His father had been incommunicable for days; Guran had risen early on an unmarked 16th birthday, intending to pedal as far as Ashbourne. Somewhere en route he'd stopped to explore an abandoned bluejohn mine sunk into a limestone cavern, its dark fissure visible from the roadside and forming an arched portal like a gateway to a medieval English castle.

He'd left his bicycle lying flat on the grass, and with the aid of a weak torchlamp set in to explore the cave. He had penetrated the cavern a good 30 yards looking for a worked vein, maybe a flake of bluejohn he could chip off and take home with him, but had found nothing. It was damp. There was a heavy echo to the dripping solution forming nipples of calcium carbonate that had probably started around Merlin's time: there was in that watery echo an intimation of mortality that sent a premonitory shiver – or was it a drip of water from the cavern roof? – eeling down his spine. Sound amplified. The crunching of gravel under his feet seemed to ricochet from the wet walls before crawling into crevices to die in soundless convulsion. The cave began to have a bad feel to it. With his vaporous torchlight scanning the damp vaults, Guran had set a hesitant foot further into the cave and had stumbled in the darkness. He'd already decided to turn back when he became aware of another's presence in the blackness.

"Beautiful, what?"

The man had evidently been watching him for some time. He stood in a scooped recess running at 45 degrees to the main shaft. Guran could discern only a tall figure silhouetted in the dark. Instinctively he turned the torch on the man.

"Do you mind? The torch."

"Sorry." He flashed the light away, but had seen enough to observe an elderly gentleman with heavy jowls, intimidatingly tall but leaning on a walking stick.

The man stepped forward. "I said it's beautiful; you didn't answer."

"What is so?"

"Not English eh? Have a cigarette."

Guran blushed to his scalp. Even in the dark he felt that this interloper could see him redden. Guran, who hitherto had never smoked, found himself accepting the proffered cigarette. Later he would master English to be more than adequately able to disguise the common solecism betraying him on this occasion, but he was 16 years old and, though already an adept at trying to pass himself off as native, still inclined to forget himself in moments of stress.

His foreign status seemed to have aroused interest rather than hostility. As the man stepped forward to strike a match for him, Guran saw the yellow flare from the match creep over a facial landscape in stark relief, clinted lines splaying from a volcanic rim surrounding swollen liquid black-lake eyes. Boulder-weighted pouches under those eyes sent shadows darting over high-ridge cheekbones until the match was snuffed out.

"Been having a squint at the BJ have we?"

"Excuse me?"

"Excuse you? Why not. The bluejohn I mean. BJ. Seen it have you? No? Then follow me, and flash that torch over here. Onwards, man!"

They walked into the cavern for another 20 yards or so. The man stopped and traced a fat, heavy finger along the damp wall of the cavern. "See that? That's your bluejohn. Semi-precious. Interesting phrase that, semi-precious. Don't get excited; means worth next to nothing. But its uniqueness, that's the thing. Unique flaw. Freak accidental meeting of minerals. Runs through these caverns like veins of blood, correction, is veins of blood. Transformation of substances is the thing." He rested a swollen, hairy white hand on the wall. Guran could see a bright blue vein snaking across the back of the white hand. Cox studied him. "But that's privileged isn't it? Then again, you might be a unique flaw, hmm? The very vein across the white hand. What d'ye say to that?"

"Excuse me?"

"Excuse you. Never mind. Privileged, all that."

The coal ember from the ends of their lighted cigarettes, the insipid yellow light from the torch, maybe a reflecting polished chip of the bluejohn in the walls, but Sevenberg could see all of these colours in the pale skin of this shadowy man. "But it was the darkness to which I originally referred. As a thing of beauty. An imponderable, and you caught me at it when you came in. Pondering the imponderable that is. Shall we?" Here he indicated the way back. "No, no; you first. Because anything can take shape out of the darkness, and that's not even privileged. Sweden, did you say? You can take that chip of BJ back to Sweden with you. Tell 'em I said you could."

Guran was mesmerized by words to which he knew he should have been able to attach meanings but which he found elusive. When they emerged from the cave, he found the figure slightly shrunken by daylight. That daylight was even harsher on the crowsfeet and folds and pouches under the eyes, but Guran found something captivating about the man's ugliness, especially as it combined with an air of collapsed dignity.

Evidently the man's walking-stick was decorative rather than functional. He looked not unlike those pictures Guran had seen of the bulldog-faced British leader, though more of a defeated Churchill than the cigar-chewing v-saluting icon of projected victory with which he would become familiar. But there was something else, something Guran originally assumed to be a property of the cavern from which they had just emerged; that is a strong, masculine root odour, not altogether unpleasant, emanating from the man. He introduced himself as Cox, Royston Cox. The Sir business wouldn't be mentioned until sometime later.

Cox had collected his bicycle, which was hidden behind a bush, and together they had pushed their bikes, wheel spokes clicking to each other as they walked away from the cavern. "Want to be more careful with your bike," said Cox. "Nation of thieves, the British. Have your bell your saddle your pump and your sandwiches. Piece at a time."

"But you're British," Guran laughed.

"Not many of the good ones left," said Cox, and Guran had no way of telling if he was serious.

Cox offered to show him one or two other local places of interest. Guran accepted. "Of course if it wasn't wartime we could do it in the old coach; but all petrol is directed towards the glorious cause of vanquishing the Anti-Christ is it not?" The irony was lost on Guran, who listened with attention to everything he was being told.

"Know ye," said Cox, "that this here is the dark heart of England, this Peak District you've found yourself in. The dark heart of England. More witchcraft and wonderment per square foot than any place in these islands, and still going on, oh yes, too much for a young Swede to be interested, eh?"

"No, it is very interesting, really. I like to see things."

Which is how Cox came to be Guran Svenberg's guide to the dark heart. Cox was greatly interested to learn how Guran and his father came to be there, and sympathized effusively with both the boy's homesickness and his condemnation of his father's haste in turning his back on his country.

"Would you say that your father made a mistake?"

Guran, a little cautious, said, "I just want to be back in Sweden."

Together they compassed the Peak District in search of magic places. They found them. Stone circles of Arbor Low or the Seven Sisters; wind-blasted rocks on Stanton Moor; bewitched houses at Bakewell; pagan wells at Castleton; haunted dales, lake-flooded caverns, Celtic burial mounds, ruined mills, gibbet hills, submerged villages and bleak moorland. Through all of this Cox carefully noted the young Swede's response to the nuances of each new location, his sensitivity to atmosphere and vibration. Through the boy he seemed to take vicarious pleasure, sniffing the wind with satisfaction before turning away.

The relationship – it could never be called a friendship; there was never anything approaching warm affection in the chemistry that bonded them – developed in this way. Guran was often a guest at Cox's large Georgian house near Bakewell; occasionally he even stayed the night in a stale-smelling spare room if they planned an ambitious cycling expedition somewhere. He was never entirely comfortable on these occasions. Cox's gruff amiability would sometimes give way irrationally. The boy often felt the eyes of the older man appraising him from across a room.

When caught looking at Guran like this, Cox might bark nastily, "Not a Nancy Boy are you? Eh?"

"Excuse me?"

"Excuse you? I said you're not a Nancy are you? Not a Whistler? Not a bloody Swedish Shirtlifter are you? Well?"

"No."

"That's just as well."

Then the gruff amiability would return.

The months passed and the weather began to restrict cycling expeditions. Guran became a more frequent overnight guest. Cox rarely seemed to socialize with anyone, and received only the occasional guest other than the boy. Guran was very soon to discover the reason for that. Meanwhile Cox encouraged him to make the most of the hospitality on offer. There was a cook, a maid, a gardener, and

Cox confessed that he couldn't enjoy the house without some company to appreciate the place with him.

For Guran it was all fascinating. The much-travelled Cox regaled him with strange stories, things he was never sure whether to believe. The atmosphere of the house was in general convivial; they would sit before a roaring open hearth in a room decorated with bizarre objects collected from India, China and Persia. Cox served up drinks which made Guran feel sophisticated and worldly: scotch, gin, liqueurs of pastel shades with exotic tastes he had never tried before and never would again.

Occasionally Cox would have one of his unprovoked nasty turns, slamming down his glass. "Not a ruddy Pansie are you? Not a Turd-Burglar? Eh? A Fruit? Not one of our Threepenny Tanners are you? You look like a damned Syrup-Sucker to me."

At other times Cox would drink himself into slurring, semi-coherence. Guran, woozy himself with alcohol, would hear the older man rail against people and organizations he'd never heard of. The targets for these long anaesthetized monologues came in two categories. One was political, the other concerned the craft.

Through the little he could understand of these late-night diatribes, spittle-lashed invectives for which he was only symbolic audience, Guran gathered that the knighted Englishman felt his country was fighting a war in which its sword had been pledged to the wrong side. Sir Royston Cox was a Mosleyite, had been a founder-member of the British Union of Fascists in 1932 along with the chief blackshirt and a lot of other people who liked to dress up. Together with Oswald Mosley and others he had led the British agitation against the Jews in the 1930s and the violent street clashes against "London Jews, lefties and other riffraff."

Long before the war, Cox had even been introduced to the German führer by Unity Mitford, and so impressed was he by the Nazi leader that he had personally promised to deliver the British people into a projected future alliance. They were nature's allies. The aristocracy, it could be attested, were already admirers, and he, Cox, had great faith in the English working classes and what's more, trying for a joke with the führer here, all the opposition, the poets and the shirtlifters, were holed up in Barcelona in fratricidal bickering. The meeting had been short. Cox remembered how the führer had listened to him with moist, attentive eyes.

A great deal had happened since then.

Mosley had been interned in 1940. Cox, similarly seen as a security threat, had also been interrogated and interned for a while. Only his establishment connections secured him an early release. Cricketing handshakes had been made, public school hearts had been crossed. Cox's movements, like the Svenbergs' had been circumscribed. Certainly he was watched. It all explained why a wealthy man like Cox couldn't come by black-market petrol for his car: he wasn't allowed to use it. An Axis victory would have brought him power; but he was put to watch the reversals of war turn in the Allies' favour, and he began to dwell increasingly in the world of might-have-been.

The other subject of his bitterness, *the craft*, had also failed him. Rather, it was not so much *the craft*

which had failed him, more the circus of ridiculous figures who draped themselves in its occult flag and who had forced him to seek out his own path. Cox didn't seem to be exactly clubable. He'd had a run-in – and out – with the Golden Dawn in the late 20s; and in and out again another time it seemed. Guran had never heard of The Order of the Golden Dawn until Cox had mentioned it, and judging by Cox's descriptions, they didn't sound a particularly attractive organization.

"Met them all, one time or another. Lot of damned silly dressing up. Dissipated. Windbags. Telling a chap what's privileged and what's not privileged. That MacGregor Mathers: bloody jock parading around in a lot of feathers. Julius Caesar. Nonsense. Buggers, a lot of 'em, too." Here he looked dangerously at Guran who was sipping a banana liqueur. "Worn out sodomists. That Crowley: more dressing up and dirty duffshuffling, turning the whole thing into a queer's vaudeville. Left it? I'll say I left it. Craft is the craft. Let me tell you something, you young Swede: you hear a chap use the words *sexual magic* and you know for certain he's a Fruit."

These sessions could go on for hours. All that was expected of Guran was an occasional grunt or a snicker or some assertion of agreement. With the fire dying in the grate, Cox would often get out of his huge armchair and wander out of the room, not to return for half an hour or so. Guran was eventually initiated into *the craft* without even knowing about it.

One evening Cox had given him a glass of some piss-coloured liquid tasting of sugar and herb bitters. "Don't sniff at it," Cox had growled, "drink it!" There was nothing new in this. Cox had on several occasions presented him with unrecognizable cocktails turning out to be either pleasant to the palate or frankly disgusting. Guran drank.

Cox sat in his usual chair, talking freely, but after ten minutes Guran found himself losing concentration. He felt a tightening in his bowels, as if some claw was twisting his intestines like an elastic band. Cox looked strange and ridiculous in his chair by the crackling fire, squat like a toad, and even dappled and warted like one too. Guran did something he had never done before. He laughed out loud at Cox.

Cox stopped talking abruptly and looked at him intently. Then he left the room. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece became very loud until it sounded like an itching inside Guran's own head. He decided that if he could arrest the march of time it would stop him from feeling so sick, and was about to do something destructive to the clock when Cox returned. The older man was still green-faced and toad-like, smiling, clutching something in his hand. It was a jar, like a large kilner jar containing a pale yellow liquid. When he spoke he sounded as though he was speaking from far across the room, and then, instantaneously and loudly in his ear. It was frightening.

"This is what you drank," Cox breathed, "if you are at all interested."

Guran peered into the jar. Something was floating inside it, suspended in the liquid. At first he couldn't make it out. Then the toad-image of Cox persuaded

him that he was looking at a dead toad suspended in the liquid. At last he realized that what he was looking at was a hand, a severed human hand, black and wizened, long black fingernails, a thin discoloured silver ring on the thin forefinger, preserved in the fluid of the jar.

"A witch's hand. Very old. Maleficarum. Had to go to Germany to get that, place near Wurtemberg. Victim of the inquisition. Like it? Tasty, what? Try another glass?"

Guran stood up. The ceiling lowered crashingly.

"Know why witches have long fingernails?" Cox goaded. "It's for what they keep under their fingernails!"

He marched out to the bathroom with Cox hurrying beside him and still clutching the jar with the pickled hand. "No no no, you stupid young Swede, don't throw up. You'll lose it. Transformation, that's the thing. Keep it inside you. Transform it. Privileged, it is. Don't let me see you go and waste the wretched stuff."

Guran ignored him, kicked open the bathroom door and hung his head over a Royal Doulton ceramic toilet bowl in which Chinese dragons cavorted across oriental gardens under the mahogany hinged seat. He felt the vomit rising from his stomach and went to put his fingers down his throat to help him retch.

"No no no you, silly little Swede, don't put your fingers in your mouth. You don't want to be sick, you'll miss your chance, stand up. Stand up. I said stand up and that's an order!"

Cox didn't put out a single restraining finger, but Guran stood up straight at the barked command. "Good. Now do what I say, and whatever else don't throw up. Try to hold it there. Let your body transform it into something useful."

Guran felt his impulse to vomit arrested in mid-channel. The tightening in his bowels, however, continued and he had to fight back a similar urge to throw down his trousers and evacuate into the toilet. Cox led him back to the lounge and sat him down. Then he built up the fire before turning back to the boy. "Good. Very good. I'm impressed. Now. Describe to me what you see."

It was a dirty trick. But it was only the beginning.

It was a dirty trick all right, that business with the witch's hand; the first of many dirty tricks. But Cox took the craft seriously, and the young Guran Svenberg seemed to have passed some kind of test.

The following day Cox rewarded him with effusive praise and gave him books to read, books which he couldn't then understand. Why did he keep returning to Cox's house? Because he felt involved, in an unspoken enterprise to which he was now firmly committed. Because it was exciting, and Cox seemed to be preparing him for something. Because the ingesting of potions was a heady substitute for the peaking sexuality of an adolescent boy. Because of the novelty of being treated as an adult with his own destiny instead of a nonentity. In fact, the same reasons which always apply, because it felt both right and dangerous at the same time.

Once Cox understood that Guran had made a conscious decision to be "in" on the game, things accelerated rapidly. The principles of the craft were



progressively unfolded to him. Guran was highly susceptible to the privilege.

All that had been almost two years ago. Now Guran was moving towards his 18th birthday as he plummeted down the hill away from the Hope valley, the folded sheets of stolen foolscap tucked inside his breast pocket. A rare exchange with his father had resulted in an angry confrontation. Svenberg senior had suddenly demanded to know what his son did with his time, and had been shocked by the exhibition of vehemence, in both the English and Swedish languages, with which his enquiries had been returned. The argument, however, was already forgotten by Guran, pedalling harder as the hill descent bottomed out, speeding on to his appointment with Cox.

The principles of the craft had not always been easy to grasp. Neither was Cox, as a teacher, equipped with the best attributes of patience. The key word seemed to be *transformation* but, so far as Guran could make out, the mechanics of its operation danced perplexingly between the concrete and the abstract.

"Transformation is the thing," Cox had told him, "it's all on transformation d'ye see it? Interaction between mind and matter. Start by looking at stage magic if you like, even though that's all parody. The heavy elements come later, but understand it's all on transformation. It all counts. Look at the making of wine, thickie, that's craft. Transformation, see, grape sugar into alcohol; or again by the action of bacteria on the wine into vinegar. With me? Application of mind interacting with matter. The transformation of one substance into another is the whole thing. Everything we make, all this stuff is the transformation of matter, it's just the familiar end of the craft, understand that much and we're in danger of getting somewhere. Got the drift? Engines, technology, all the same principle. Look at medicine: once that was at the esoteric end of things, now it's all in the familiar. Craft. Only now called medicine. Or science. See how words disarm? Is this going in, thick boy?"

"I think so."

"What's the use of think so? Eh? Where will think so get you? What I'm saying, you thick Swede, is that without mind, d'ye follow me, matter has no form, shape, colour, no properties, might as well be without existence. All reduces down to the single indiscriminate what. That's it, the indistinguishable what. But the very *what* is the key to the craft, see?"

"Yes..."

"Never mind that... see that wine I told you about? Grape sugars into alcohol. Craft. Then transformation of the drinker of the wine by absorption into the bloodstream. Craft. What happens? New thoughts, actions, behaviour and influences all generated. Then wine into blood is a short step, if that's your bent. A short step. Communion wine. Beginning to understand me? Penny beginning to drop is it? Reducing matter to its single essence – the what – and reconstituting it in new forms. That's the craft. At the heart of everything. D'you understand it, thickie? I don't know why I bother with you you're so damned thick."

Guran said he did understand, thought he might, and hoped he could. At least all that was the easier stuff. More difficult to penetrate were Cox's remarks about transforming into animal shapes – something he promised, with a chuckle, that Guran would

attempt – and the manipulation of one's enemies. Unsure even of whom those enemies were, Guran wondered if they were capable of manipulating you in return, but chose to say nothing rather than risk one of Cox's withering rebukes.

Together they would make the dead walk, Cox said, make the dead walk. Guran, with 16-year-old blue eyes wide as bicycle wheels and shining like chromium, had blinked his pale lashes at that one.

But where comprehension failed, the gaps between certainties were to be filled with potions; potions that ran with impressive fluidity between the dry bricks of reason, like liquid mortar. Oh yes, magic is lubricated, activated, agitated and fixed in place by potions and substances and concoctions – no one called them drugs in those days, they were the appurtenances of the magician. It was an old routine, sorcerer and his apprentice, but Guran Svenberg made a more than willing student.

On the day Guran freewheeled through the beautiful summer of Peak district wartime England he was on his way to deliver to Cox some of his father's cryptograms (folded in his breast pocket next to his heart): code structures of the type in which old Thomas Svenberg had given up trying to interest the War Office. Cox however had long shown an interest. Mosley had been released from internment for some time, after more Freemason's handshakes and cricket-club oaths.

It was too late, long too late, the Axis ascendancy had ended with the reversals of the North Africa campaign, there'd been the German defeat at Stalingrad, American naval victories in the Pacific, the Italian capitulation, it was really all over. D-Day had come and gone, and now it was all just mopping-up. Unless you were a diehard that is, believing that late German resistance to the inevitable was somehow going to transform itself into yet another reversal. Cox was one of these, belonging to a circle still intent on getting information to a doomed Berlin – that sub-postmistress was right! – and had decided that Thomas Svenberg's redundant codes might come in useful now. He'd been pressuring Guran for some time into delivering these goods, and for a long while Guran held back, guessing at the possible recriminations.

Held back until this particular day, that is. At Cox's house he swung off his still-moving bicycle, leaned it against the wall at the rear of the house and used the back entrance. Cox, in smoking jacket, took the papers and studied them.

"Means nothing to me. Might not even be of use. Still, we'll pass them on. See you taking them, did he?"

"No. These are copies which I made."

"Good man. Spot of tea?"

Guran doesn't know it at the time, could guess if he cared enough, but isn't that just it, he doesn't care: the handover of his father's cryptograms is the decisive act which will eventually prompt him to move in with Cox and effect the formulation of his character. Some weeks later his father will receive a visit from the security services. Coded transmissions to Berlin will have been intercepted, and some boffin codebreaker will be surprised by the unique structure of a particularly difficult code full of

false signifiers, will puzzle over its familiarity until *hey Valerie blow the dust off that file on the Swede you know the one in Derbyshire, used to keep sending us numericals and circularities yes him...* With Guran leaning on his bicycle and watching from a distance, old Thomas will be last seen helped into an official black motor car by two men in long raincoats. What will happen to him? Who knows. Maybe the security services knew the set-up exactly. Probably they knew all about Cox and his cronies. Perhaps the old guy can help them ascertain exactly what is known in terms of the information they are trying to get across to Berlin. But that's just it. Guran doesn't really care.

It's Cox who suggests it. "So? Move in here. It'll be more comfortable than that soaking cottage of yours up in Hope Valley."

So Guran moves in with Cox. Certain events take place. There are rites and there are humiliations. The craft seems to have no borders, no frontiers other than those defined for the moment by its practitioners. It can run from cartomancy to chemically-altered states of consciousness to blatantly Satanic invocations. Mind, Matter, Man; so runs the litany. Mind over Matter, Matter over Man. Manipulate Matter, Manipulate Man. Vinegar Wine Blood. On Cox's instructions, Guran's head is shaved; he fasts; repeats endless apparently insignificant tasks; chants mantras in a strange tongue; invokes demons which at first are only names...

Meanwhile it is Cox who strictly controls the supply of fluids, substances, concoctions. And there are rituals. Weird rituals. Cox hires the services of women, wartime prostitutes who come in from Nottingham or Manchester. There is one in particular. Cox prepares her for Guran, paints her body grey like a cadaver, a little crimson around the eyes, black-painted fingernails and toenails, lays her out like the dead; he performs on her the sevenfold kiss of the warlock, brow, mouth, breasts, vagina, thighs, and then instructs Guran to "bring her back to life". Afterwards the grey greasepaint glimmers on his cock, the shining kiss of the grave, imprint of the dead. It is Guran's first sexual experience.

It doesn't take long for Guran to realize that Cox is raving mad, hopelessly paranoid. If he balks at performing any of the required rites, Cox unleashes one his tirades against homosexuals, reciting the usual catalogue of epithets. "Picked up a Whistler, have I? All this for a bloody Pastry-stabber! Pansy! A bloody Ginger in the house is it?" Guran allows these moments to pass.

Just as Cox predicted, things start to happen without the aid or use of drugs. Small prophecies, strange coincidences, correlations, manifestations. Cox is a believer in the New Millennium, that is he believes in the end of the Christian era of 2000 years as signalled by the rise of the Third Reich. He believes utterly in the world stewardship of the new Aryan order, dismissing recent developments as propaganda, and still expects the red, black and white swastika flag to be fluttering over Westminster any day now. The accumulation of strange coincidences which they are now experiencing, he tells Guran, are signals of the rapid approach of the New Millennium.

One day Cox receives a rare visit, someone up from London. By now Guran is able to spot an English aristocrat when he sees one. "Another Whistler," Cox tells him confidentially. "You run along out into the garden while I talk to him here."

After an hour the visitor comes out into the garden and introduces himself as Buxton. He remarks on the weather and says a few words about the flowering hydrangeas before making his excuses and leaving.

After the man's departure Cox says, "He knew about you of course."

"Oh?"

"That's what brought him here."

"Had you told him?"

"No; he knew."

"What did he know?"

"About you. Of your existence, I mean. Knew that I'd got a... student. Helping me. He knew it."

"Did he tell you he'd known that?"

"Not in words of course. But in a way which he knew I would recognize."

"How?"

"Privileged, that."

"Ah!"

"You hadn't told him then?"

"Me?"

"Yes you. Had you told him?"

"How would I tell him? I didn't know of him until today."

"There are other ways," said Cox.

"Ah."

"Try to win you over, did he?"

"Who, Buxton?"

"Don't play games. Try to make you go across did he?"

"Across...?"

"To him. To him, you Swedish Shit-Stabber. Across to him."

"Why would he do that?"

"Old enemy of mine. Buxton. Wants a boy himself. Getting old, wants to pass on the craft, said so himself. Old enemy."

"He seemed quite friendly."

"Don't be a fool! What did he say to you outside?"

Guran tells him. Cox is suspicious and makes him recount the conversation in the garden word for word, down to tone of voice used. He explores every phrase and remark for nuance and meaning. Guran is forced to promise to inform Cox should Buxton attempt to communicate with him again.

Cox, however, doesn't leave it there. His paranoia spreads like a livid rash. He frequently accuses Svenberg of being in league with his enemies. He behaves like a jealous lover. Absurd caution is demonstrated over the fate of his nail pairings and loose strands of hair on his hairbrush, collecting them up and locking them in a casket kept in his bedroom. Guran even finds himself accused of trying to get at the contents of the casket, the existence of which was unknown until Cox had disclosed its whereabouts. Through all of Cox's ravings, Guran protests loyalty, but Cox refuses to relax his guard.

One morning he is approached by Cox, who demands to be given a sample of the boy's semen in a jar.

"My what? What for?" says Guran.

The question pitches Cox into a frenzy. "Do I have to justify my actions to a boy? To my enemies' catamite? Do I? Well, do I?"

Just as quickly his attitude changes. He apologizes for this outburst, explaining that he is under some strain: his enemies are gathering energy to send against them both. He needs the semen to make a protective magic amulet that will direct the negative energy back at its source. Now does he understand? Guran obliges. He takes the jar away to his room, masturbates into it and presents it back to the waiting Cox.

"I'd like to learn how it's done, if it's allowed."

"Privileged, that. Another time and I'll teach you. But not now."

Cox retires to his room. Guran doesn't see him for three days, and won't disturb him because a peaceful run of the house is always preferable to Cox's ravings. On the fourth evening, still without having seen a sign of Cox, he reads until the fire dies down in the hearth, and then retires to bed at around 10 p.m. As he undresses he can see from his bedroom window a brilliant sickle of silver moon dying into its left-hand cup. Its light is clean like a honed razor; it is strange light, it has key, like some textured surface. He closes the curtains and climbs into bed, falling into a deep sleep.

At exactly midnight he is awoken by the presence of someone standing at the foot of the bed. He blinks his eyes, but it's too dark to make out the figure standing there, unmoving. Perhaps it is Cox's black silhouette he sees, or maybe it's someone else. He can't be certain. He makes to challenge the figure but his words are stopped in his mouth when suddenly he sees a shimmering, silver-blue lozenge of light in the outstretched hand of the figure at the foot of the bed. The light dances, trembles; it becomes crescent-shaped, sharp-edged and yet fluid. He realizes that the curtains of the window have been drawn back by the intruder, and that the light he is looking at is a mirror reflecting the dying crescent of moon, reflecting it back at him, playing the light across his face.

He sits up sharply in bed. This movement is met by the swift advance of the shadow figure bearing the mirror. In the intruder's other hand he sees a leaden rod, raised aloft as if to strike. The mirror is pushed close to his face. Guran sees the image of his own fear in the mirror, his own terrified face, eyes wide as black saucers, nostrils flaring, lip turned back in an ugly curl, and at that moment the other arm of the intruder brings the lead rod crashing down on the mirror. It shatters into pieces.

Guran collapses back on his bed. He twists and writhes in agony. Neither the lead rod nor the shattered mirror have so much as scratched his skin, but it feels as if each jagged shard of mirror glass has pierced his stomach and is slicing his innards with hot, searing, downward cuts. He pulls his knees up under his chin. He howls out loud. At the periphery of his pain he senses the door opening and closing as the shadow figure goes out of the room. The pain is like daggers working deeper into him, has him vomiting over the side of the bed, but it doesn't recede. No-one answers his cries. He spends the night in tortured convulsions, utterly unable to move, shivering in a fever of cold fire, gagging at the air.

No one comes until the following morning. At last the door opens, and there is Cox, kneeling beside the bed, cupping Guran's face in his large, hairy hands. He is full of concern.

"You see! You've been daggered! You doubted me, you poor boy, but you see the danger you are in! Tell me what happened! Tell me!"

Guran tries to speak but every effort to form a word is a razor of fire working deeper into his bowels.

"Enemies!" cries Cox. "I told you! I warned you! This is my fault; I should have taken more care! I was working on something to protect you from this. You see what happens when you don't exercise care? Do you see?"

But Guran is weeping with pain. His bowels evacuate in the bed. "Wait," says Cox, "wait. I'll bring you something."

Cox goes out and returns with a syringe. Without ceremony he aims for a buttock. Guran doesn't even feel the needle pierce the skin, though within a few seconds he feels the morphine breaking like a wave across his body. The wave becomes a great-winged white bird chasing wraiths across the surface of the planet. It becomes a cool hand, jewelled with tiny bells, loosening the rack on which he lies stretched. It's a sailing ship rigged with incense plying a honey sea. It's the full-lipped kiss of oblivion.

He hears Cox's disembodied voice talking to him as if from a great distance. He can't answer. He folds his mind into the protective feathered breast of the morphine.

He has no idea how time passes. After some hours the effects of the morphine retreat, and the violence of the pain returns. It's like a familiar, recurring nightmare. He cries out to Cox for another shot of the white, crystalline powder. Cox warns him of the dangers of the continued use, but he only cries out louder for the narcotic. Cox will only agree to administering the drug on alternate days. Guran experiences the blissful release on one day and the recurring agony the next. Always he knows that just behind the morphine, just across her protective wing is the hag-headed dagger-eyed blood-fanged pain waiting for her turn, for her reckoning, like night following day, winter closing on summer. He endures the unendurable.

And with each passing day the pain diminishes, but slightly. He feels it being driven back, slowly edged out, but only by the divine hand of the morphine he craves. A month passes, a month of Cox's morphine nursing. After 28 days of fight and flight, the pain is finally banished. But he is left with a habit: the cherished gift of the narcotic.

"I tried to warn you about that," says Cox, demonstrating to Guran how to use a tourniquet to fix the morphine for himself. "But you cursed me and screamed at me until I had to give it to you. Anyway it's a small thing: always in plentiful supply and always will be."

Guran fixes, and looks thankful.

Cox, of course of course, controls supply. It's not that he strings Guran out; not much anyway. If he holds back with the morphine, as he explains himself, it's only in Guran's interests isn't it? Since the event, with Guran's loyalty secured by this dependence, Cox seems less paranoid, more relaxed, less inclined to let fly his accusatory arrows. He trusts Guran that much more because, naturally, it's certain that Guran isn't going anywhere.

As for Guran, he is not without his suspicions. He never got a good look at whoever it was who invaded his bedroom and his mind that night, but despite a shoal of red herrings released into the already murky water by Cox, he's not stupid. He gives no voice to his suspicions, and plays thankful to Cox for having delivered him from the agonies of whatever *craft* has daggered him. But he determines to find out.

The question is how. Guran has been spending his convalescent time well, has been doing a lot of forbidden reading. If he understands things correctly, he's got to take a look inside that locked casket, which is in Cox's locked bedroom. That other business, the life-seed, the semen, is going to prove difficult. How to get access to a single pearly drop of Cox's own? How do you overcome a sorcerer?

The books are less than direct. Steal his darkness, it says, steal away his dreams and keep them pressed between the pages of a heavy ledger. So Guran plans for the moment when he can steal away Cox's darkness.

Opportunity comes when Cox is drawn away to Manchester on unspecified business. Guran suspects a trap, a trick, a test, but he accompanies Cox to the village railway station. He sees his master climb into a carriage and watches the train shunt northwards. It is possible that Cox might disembark at the next village along the line, a matter of only five or six miles, and return to catch him in the act. But act he must.

He returns to the house, dismisses the maid, and goes immediately to Cox's bedroom. It is locked. The door is of sturdy design. It would be impossible to remove a panel and replace it without leaving some evidence of the break-in. Once, in the early flush of their relationship, Cox had made lavish promises that he would teach the boy how to develop the strength of an elephant, and the power to walk through walls. If such powers existed, which he doubted, they had never been imparted to him. Meanwhile the only way is going to be through the bedroom window.

Outside, he leans a ladder against the window, climbs it, and inserts a slim chisel between the flush fit of the sash-window frames. A slight tap on the chisel and the catch flies open. The window whispers a protest as it is pushed up. He runs through a list of likely explanations should he be caught. Before swinging himself inside the room, he looks back down, half expecting to see the old man at the foot of the ladder.

Cox's room has a peculiar hushed quality. It is north-facing, and it sighs with the absence of direct sunlight. Heavy furniture, oaks and mellowed mahoganies, all seems to belong to some larger house. A dressing table has a mirror jaundiced with yellow mottle, giving the reflections a smokey lack of definition. The room is heavy with Cox's personal odour, the root, masculine smell Guran had noticed that first day in the bluejohn cavern. Peculiar artefacts are placed with some sense of strategy around the room, perhaps obeying lines of force Guran only imagines: oriental figurines, African carvings. There are picture frames, one on each wall, curiously empty: no photographs, no prints or paintings, nothing inside the frames. Adjacent to the dressing table is an octagonal



cane table, on which stands a hinged casket carved from ebony and inlaid with horn and ivory. Like the door to the room, it is locked.

He sets about carefully unscrewing the brass hinges at the back of the casket. The lid opens from the back and the lock pops free of its chamber. Downstairs a door slams. He freezes, waits. There is nothing. He left the door ajar, and the wind has blown it shut. He places the casket lid on the dressing table.

Inside the casket are Cox's hairbrush and combs: loose hairs have been collected and pressed onto a tacky pellet of wax. Nail pairings are collected in small cylindrical containers, presumably each with ten crescent-shaped clippings. But it is not these things which are of interest to him. The only other objects in the casket are a framed mirror and a lead baton. He takes out the mirror.

The wood-framed mirror is cracked in numerous places, but it has been carefully reconstructed with none of the pieces missing. The segments of broken mirror hang loosely together in the frame. The curious feature of the broken pieces is that they are regular; they are all roughly wedged-shaped, like slices of a cake. Clearly they have been cut in that shape before the mirror was broken. Guran counts them. There are exactly fourteen. On the surface of the glass are smeared traces of some viscous substance. He intuits everything he needs to know about how the deed was done.

He regards his face in the cracked mirror, recalling a fragment of moon, a fingernail of silver light dancing in the mirror before it happened. Then the morphine to which he is now tied was administered to him every second day, over a period of 28 days, the lunar month, during which time, every other day, the mirror would be reconstructed. The pain had been drawn off, but never the morphine.

He replaces the mirror in the box. There is some difficulty in fitting the lid to cause the lock to re-engage; he has to risk leaving it half-tumbled, but neatly screws the brass hinges back into position. At the window he uses a double-thread of cotton to draw the window catch back into position behind him, snapping it cleanly to withdraw any tell-tale evidence.

Cox returns that evening, in a somewhat jovial mood. He gives Guran a book he found in an antiquarian shop. He appears to suspect nothing, and when his cheerful mood persists the following day, Guran feels satisfied. He is ready to begin. The first thing he must do is to let Cox know that he is targeted, letting paranoia do most of the work.

"So what did you get up to while I was away, you bloody Swede?"

"Not much, Roy. I slept most of the daytime. Something is keeping me awake at nights lately. Bad dreams and all that."

"Poor old Swede."

"Got a bit scared once or twice while you were away. Strange smells around the house, Shadows where no light is shining, that sort of thing."

"Oh?" says Cox. "Oh?"

A few days later, Guran drops another hint. "That time you were away in Manchester. There was a kind of whispering. Not external, you understand, but inside my own head."

"Whispering, you say? That Buxton hasn't been in touch with you, has he? Didn't telephone or anything?"

"No. Just a whispering. Shadows and whispering. It's beginning to get on top of me."

"Yes."

"Only you don't mind me telling you, do you? I thought you might have some ideas."

"I'll have to think."

"I'm pretty scared, Roy."

"Don't worry; I'll take steps."

"Could it be that Buxton? I don't want a repetition of that last business. I couldn't take another round of that, Roy."

"I said I'll take steps. You're under my protection. First I shall have to find out who's behind it."

Guran doesn't know what "steps," if any, Cox intends to take, but the suspicion has been planted. Meanwhile he has to find ways of disrupting Cox's sleep, and Cox is too familiar with the effects of stimulants and other chemicals for him to risk adulterating the old man's food.

Cox comes to his bedroom in the middle of the night. "Can you smell burning, lad?"

"Yes."

They switch on all the house lights and try to detect the source of the smell, without success. It happens on three occasions. Other nights he gives Cox time enough to sink into the first levels of sleep before rousing him, either with his own simulated anxieties or by loud noises made in the yard underneath Cox's window through simple mechanical devices untraceable back to him.

Like the smashing of the jar containing the witch's hand after they have gone to bed. It topples from the mantelpiece where it has lived since the day Cox first showed it to Guran. At first Cox looks in on Guran's room, to establish that he is there; it would be impossible for the boy to have got back upstairs so quickly. Cox then runs down to the drawing room, followed by Guran, to find the wizened hand lying on the floor in a pool of the pickling solution and broken glass. That has been achieved by balancing the jar on a thin slab of ice projecting from the mantelpiece. The warmth from the dying fire has melted the ice and the jar has toppled. Cox overlooks the splashes of water on the mantelpiece: he is too busy gazing in horror at the wizened hand on the floor, which now out of solution is slowly but visibly unclenching itself, an unpredicted histrionic effect which Guran accepts gratefully.

It works. Cox becomes reluctant to take his sleep at night, when he knows he's most vulnerable. Guran can see – by the angry rims round the hooded eyes, the puffed pouches, the deepening claws of the crows-feet, the dried rivulets where lost dreams drain off – Cox is spending the long nights keeping vigil. He knows Cox is trying to detect who is behind it all, but the finger won't point his way. For one thing, he is using trickery rather than magic, and that, it seems, obeys different laws. It must be driving Cox crazy.

But there is the aid of magic. Every night since the targeting of Cox, Guran has cut out a silhouette from a sheet of black sugarpaper, an outline resembling only roughly the hunched shape of Cox, three-legged because of the ash cane he carries. Every night a fresh

silhouette is slipped between a different page of a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. This ritual goes on for a lunar month. Through taking only snatches of sleep in the daytime, Cox is becoming evil-faced with lack of rest, a colour like the blue-red of raw liver creeping under his complexion. One late afternoon before Cox goes upstairs to snatch an hour of daytime sleep, when Guran hopes the old man will be too exhausted to notice, Guran slips Cox a heavy sleeping draught.

Half an hour later in the darkened room, heavy curtains drawn, the root odour present and the sleeping man exhaling heavily, Guran tries to rouse him. Should the old man awake, he has a story ready, but Cox sleeps on. Sheer exhaustion and the sleeping draught have put him out.

The next part Guran finds thoroughly distasteful, but can't see any other way for it. He pulls back the bedclothes and begins to massage Cox to an erection. Cox shifts in his sleep, but doesn't awaken. It takes a long time before he hears a quickening of Cox's breathing in his sleep. Guran sees that he has become an incubus, or possibly succubus, he's not certain, maybe both: but he thrusts a finger sharply into the sleeping man's anus, looking for the prostate gland, prompting immediate ejaculation. "That's one for the Whistlers," he says. Semen collected, he leaves the room.

Several hours later, with curtains parted and a left-hand crescent of moon dying in a cloudless sky, Guran rouses Cox from his sleep. It is exactly midnight. Cox opens his eyes and blinks at the eel of reflected moonlight swimming in the mirror held before him. "Who's that?" barks Cox. Guran holds the lead baton aloft, ready to bring it crashing down on the framed, pre-cracked mirror, giving Cox time to register what's happening before the blow is struck.

Cox's eyes flare like the eyes of a wildcat caught in a car's headlights. He jackknives up in bed, opening his mouth to cavernous dimensions truly shocking to the young Svenberg, and he lets go an ear-splitting shriek. It is unlike any sound that Guran has ever heard, rising in intensity and volume until it has him paralyzed, his hand holding the lead rod still raised aloft, unable to bring it down on the mirror, trembling in the grip of this paralysis. He is pinned there by the sonic shock of Cox's occult scream. His body begins to quake, his knees buckle. Cox has him.

He feels the pain return, the pain, the daggering blade of the mirror fragments returning as if by order, converging inside his bowels, cutting inwards, the razoring, burning agony. Cox's shriek becomes a hiss, like the spit of a snake. Guran thinks of the crashing white wave of the morphine breaking on boundless shores, and the thought liberates him momentarily from the grip. He brings the rod smashing down on the mirror. Cox sees the dark shadows, the coalblack eyes and the folds and lines of his own screaming, hissing face disintegrating in the shattering mirror, fragments of moonlit face showering on the bed and on the floor around them. This time it is his turn. The hiss is arrested in his throat. He convulses on the bed, twitching, a low-throated gargle emanating from him. He hugs himself into foetus shape.

Guran staggers blindly from the room, disoriented, crashing like a drunk, stopping to vomit over the banisters of the stairs. His brain is burning with the aftershock of Cox's nightmare shriek. He is half-blinded, his ears bleed. All he can do is grope his way to his own room, shivering, unthinking, climb into his own bed to try to get away from the source of the scream.

The following morning he is awoken by the maid. He has a fierce headache, but is otherwise unharmed. She tells him that the master is seriously ill and that she has summoned a doctor. He dresses hurriedly and goes to Cox's room. The old man remains huddled in foetal position, teeth chattering. His eyes open to watch Guran coming into the room. White spittle flecks his lips. He is unable to speak. Guran collects up the shards of mirror from the floor, watched by the suffering Cox. This time there will be no morphine, no reconstruction of the mirror to rehabilitate Cox. Let medicine do what it will for you, thinks Guran. Meanwhile he has his own appointment with the morphine.

The local doctor is unable to diagnose the complaint. He arranges for Cox to be transferred to hospital. Guran maintains the pretence of visiting the still speechless Cox at the hospital.

In four weeks the old man is dead.

Guran is surprised to discover that Cox has bequeathed to him his entire estate, which is considerable. Shortly after the death, Guran receives a telephone call.

"Hello there, Guran. Buxton here."

"Hello Buxton."

"It worked then."

"Yes. You said it might."

"Yes; I wasn't certain, but there you are. Spot of lunch at the weekend?"

Graham Joyce is one of Britain's most up-and-coming fantasy and horror writers, with three novels now on the market (see Paul McAuley's review of the latest in this issue). His one previous appearance in *Interzone* was with "The Careperson" (issue 58). He lives in Leicester, where he was employed as a youth worker before becoming a full-time writer.

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Things Suffered and Things Seen

John Clute

It is perhaps a good guess that very few sf writers any longer think we own the future. Which is not (one might add) before time. The future may have been fun while it lasted, and the kind of sf that did the owning was almost certainly more fun than sf will ever be again; but now that sf writers have to jostle for lebensraum with all the interpenetrating virtual-reality potions and poisons of a themed and disinherited world, the stakes have suddenly become much higher. Because it is no longer possible to bully the future into shape, it is no longer really possible to think of any tale written in the catarrhal geek pidgin of the old hard-sf regime as being worth much more than paper. The world, which once lay before us like a wilderness ripe for plumbing, or like Trantor, has turned to us its true face at last: the Medusa face which stares back at us through the mirror; the huge teeth and the bulging eyes of the homuncule-gape of glory of the god who faces us with our own gorgon face. What the world has become is us. And we are too complicated (and maybe too doomed) to be bullied into any of the Future Histories dreamt of by dinosaurs. The sf which tries to do so is a sharecropper of corpses.

There are three novels on the desk. One of them, the first half of a huge two-part tale by Ian Watson, we will mention but not review, because it needs a back end before it can be ridden with safety; but one can say that it fails utterly and flamboyantly to present any sustained agenda whatsoever for the human race. The others, by Paul Park and by William Gibson, are also representative examples of the kind of sf which no longer pretends to comprehend or dictate the shape of times to come. Each of them is a work of distinction, but neither tells a big story in the old mode; both are engorged with the superflux of things suffered and things seen, but neither is an epic (nor is either of them an example of the fixup, which is epic's peeping-tom sibling). Park's is a vignette, and Gibson's is a McGuffin chaser. They are two of the best novels this year will see.

Coelestis (HarperCollins, £14.99) looks to be a singleton, and is therefore Paul Park's first novel to

stand utterly alone, like the world it depicts, and the characters who suffer in that world. It is similar to the three volumes of *The Starbridge Chronicles*, however, in that it's set in a Long Year environment, on a planet (if Park named it, I missed the moment of naming: as far as my conscious reading experience tells me, it is just called the world) some lightyears from Earth, but colonized by humans. As usual with Park, it is not entirely easy to understand the solar mechanics governing geographies presented in terms so indurated by sensation and metaphor that perspective and breathing space are found only in bright, blinding gaps; but on this world the sun is always up, along a narrow band surrounded by darkness, and as the centuries pass the line of darkness shifts slowly through the Long Year.

The original inhabitants of the world comprised two races: what are known now by humans as the aboriginals, and the Coelestis. They had existed in a symbiosis, which the arriving human colonizers treated as obscene. Aboriginals and humans now coexist in a fashion which relentlessly evokes the culture of South Africa before the gut-loosening shifts of the past few years: rigid hierarchies; bad faith; institutionalized violence; a sense of energies either at the verge of blowing the system apart, or drying out like shed blood in sand. The Coelestis, having been demonized by the human invaders as telepathic slavers, and the bonds with their "aboriginal" sharers having been chemically broken, are now virtually extinct. Both "native" races have been lobotomized into a blind solitude, making them tolerable to humanity – Park's comparisons of the synaesthesiacal amplitude of Coelestis perceptions, and of the icy narrow blind realtor brutality of the human sensorium, are rendered with devastating precision. The sun bakes down without surcease. The races gnaw each other down. Entropy drags the colony, and its industries, and each character in the novel, down.

The story is almost nothing at all. Simon Mayaram, a junior member of the human consulate, is invited to a party at a country estate, where he meets a rich aboriginal. Almost all aboriginals in close contact with their

human masters have undergone profound physical changes, via drugs, to make them resemble their masters as much as possible. (Following the pattern of analogy with Africa which subtends almost every moment of the book, these aboriginals can be seen as a deeply cutting parody of the évolué Blacks so frequently to be found in – or at any rate in the literature about – French ex-colonies.) The rich aboriginal's daughter Catherine has been radically operated upon so that she has become "beautiful," a player of human music upon a human piano, and a Christian. She and Mayaram are kidnapped by abo guerrillas. They are pent up with one another, and have sex. Without drugs, Catherine begins to revert to her "native" shape. She seems to fixate on his penis. One of the last remaining "demons" is nearby, and the plot thickens, very moderately, for a short while. There are revelations, betrayals, deaths. For a few brief moments, within the healing ambience of the last Coelestis – before he is butchered – Catherine experiences fragmentary plunges into the abyss and paradise of Being, into worlds the owners cannot parse. But she is rescued. The drugs deaden her down again into something human. The novel ends.

The effect is not merely one of devastation, to use once again a term singularly appropriate to this superb novel; it is of loss, couched in a tragic structure which allows no appeal, no return of Cordelia. Park has himself spent much time in the Third World of this planet, and he writes like a messenger from that world. The desiccation of the unnamed planet of Coelestis, the ravishment of the shapes of its native life, the husking of its resource and resonance, all read like dispatches from anywhere on Earth outside the festungs where us readers live. Sf, for all its claims to be a literature of the planet, has conspicuously, over the decades of its maturity, been a festung literature: a literature written and read by inhabitants of the First World, humans for whom images of energy, space, ambition, frontier and territory tend to feel as though they are all one image, conceived and consumed within an impermeable bubble. Park, on the other hand, writes as though the bubble did not exist, or as though he lived outside, where the cost is naked. Coelestis is a Third World sf novel; it could be the first ever written (Fred Pfeil's *Goodman 2020* [1986], and Michael Blumlein's *The Movement of Mountains* [1987], approach some of the same material from within the barriers, though honourably.) Its darkness is the darkness we close our gated community against; but, once read, Coelestis is within the gates. It does not allow much further dreaming.

Virtual Light (Viking, £14.99), on the other hand, represents a kind of vacation for William Gibson, a move away from the chthonic tonguing of the runnels of the world he attained in *Neuromancer* (1984) as though by magic, and did not quite manage to continue doing in *Count Zero* (1986) or *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), even though both those novels were, in fact, better written than the first, and better plotted; but they didn't talk the soil of things. *Virtual Light* abandons the miming of Cyberpunk, and tells a simple McGuffin tale of a secret message contained in a pair of virtual-light sunglasses which a girl messenger in San Francisco steals from a courier and goes on the run with in the company of a boyish ex-private-cop, and it all ends in spoof pyrotechnics – sometime in the year 2005, according to some publisher's blurb which I have lost down the sort of thing that sort of thing tends to get lost down. But 2005 is ridiculous, given the *mise en scène*, and the technologies. It feels like about 15 years further down. California has become two states (the USA has effectively disintegrated), and there is a glossy smoothness of intensity to the way the new worlds operate that makes one doubt we're only a decade away. The transformation of the Oakland Bay Bridge into a third-world arcology – as prefigured in "Skinner's Room" from 1990 – has an indurated complexity to it which also radiates a sense that we have descended past the plimsoll line into the new era.

Whatever, *Virtual Light* is set a long way from the pedestrian mall of now; but it is, all the same, deeply and reassuringly familiar. The caper plot hunts the chasers who are chasing the hunted, and the virtual-light (it's a technology which embeds vast infodumps into microchips themselves embedded [say] in a pair of sunglasses, and which when activated implant data straight into the optical nerve or summat) stuff sings the edges of the mind's eye, but does not intrude much. The good guys win. Nothing is changed in the vast world, which is too much there to shake: for this is the new sf. The language throughout is superbly controlled, like Ross Thomas doing loop-the-loop. The jokes are extremely good. There is not an unprofessional moment, not a flash of incompetence or impatience. It may be a touch lifeless, a touch *mantan*; but it gives everything it promises. It is a good buy, a good read, a bargain kept by the author.

Lucky's Harvest, which is *The First Book of Mana* (Victor Gollancz, £15.99), cannot as we said earlier be reviewed. It has dozens of characters, a new way of travelling between the stars (inside something which sounds something like a language and some-

thing like a worm), interwoven cohorts of aliens, a strange planet, magical powers explainable in sf terms, bravura setpieces and quiet moments, treks; gold, and dross; brilliant and canny manoeuvres of narrative, and stuffing. It is based on the *Kalevala*. It feels as though, after 150,000 words, it might be completely out of control, completely out of an entirely whacko tree: but I don't believe for a moment that the various loose ends will continue to hang there in the wind. A loose end in the hands of Ian Watson is an electric eel playing possum. *Lucky's Harvest* should be bought, and played with. The concluding volume of the novel is due next year. Then we can do the calculations. Then we can get sober again.

(John Clute)

The Whole of the Law

Paul J. McAuley

Descending from orbit, Arthur C. Clarke set down before us three tablets of not entirely serious law, and on the third was graven a principle which many have since embodied in their fictions: that the technology of any sufficiently advanced civilization is indistinguishable from magic. In this late stage of the end game of traditional sf, it is perhaps time to offer a corollary, that in any sufficiently advanced civilization, science is indistinguishable from religion. For this is the golden thread that runs through David Zindell's **The Broken God** (HarperCollins, £15.99), which is both a sequel to his first novel, *Neverness*, and the first volume of a trilogy, *A Requiem for Homo Sapiens*.

The overwhelming central problem of fictions set against the vastness in time and space of the universe – cosmology operas – is that of contrasting human scale and human concerns with the evolution of the universe, which is generally the same kind of category mistake as drawing parallels between the Brownian motion of molecules in a cup of coffee and the thought processes of the person drinking it. The neat sidestep provided by inflating scientific hypotheses into religious beliefs is entirely necessary. *A Requiem for Homo Sapiens* is perhaps the most ambitious cosmology opera yet, in which Zindell is concerned with exploring both the origin of the Universe and its ultimate future from the point of view of his hero, who is the son of a god.

In *Neverness*, named for a city located on an icy planet in a part of the galaxy where the manifolds of space

run together to form a confluence of interstellar routes, Mallory Ringness attained an understanding of the fundamental history and nature of the universe, and became a god. In its sequel, his son, Danlo the Wild, who has grown up amongst a tribe of regressed primitives, searches out *Neverness* when all in the tribe are killed by a mysterious plague, enters (as did his father) the Academy of the Order of Mystic Mathematicians and Other Seekers of the Ineffable Flame, graduates as a space pilot, and finds himself at the centre of a cult growing around the legend of his father.

The Broken God is not so much a sequel as a rich and skilful deepening of the themes of its predecessor, and in particular the principle, common to most cosmology operas but never as boldly set forth as here, that the Universe is a machine for making gods. Mallory Ringness is a human become a god; the founder of the Architects of the Universal Cybernetic Church, who downloaded his mind into a network of computers, is another. Whole races have achieved godhood, including the Elder Eddas, who have hidden a secret history in human DNA.

Danlo, both hero and wise innocent, occupies centre stage of a long, well-populated narrative, able to view the rich, ancient culture of *Neverness* from a fresh viewpoint lent him by his upbringing amongst the Aloï, neanderthals who incorporate both Inuit and Aboriginal cultures. As with Mallory Ringness in *Neverness*, we follow Danlo's apprenticeship in the Order, intertwined with his slow getting of wisdom and his realization that much of that wisdom arises from his own inheritance. Danlo befriends a fellow apprentice, Hanuman, who becomes the dark shadow to his light and chief architect of the religion built around Mallory Ringness that Danlo repudiates, and also befriends Mallory Ringness's companion Bardo, who founds the Way of Ringness more or less in a fit of pique. It is the struggle with Hanuman which is the fire that forges Danlo's will, and which drives a long and complex narrative through encounters with alien philosophers, assassin poets, arcane fusions of religious ritual and virtual reality, and much else, culminating in Danlo's resolve to accompany an expedition to the Vild, an area of dying stars created by the Architects of the Universal Cybernetic Church which threatens to engulf the Galaxy. The Architects also created the plague which destroyed the Aloï and which, in modified form, was used by Hanuman to destroy all memory of Danlo in the woman he loves. Redemption is promised on every scale.

The narrative is meditative and wordy, advancing by slow cadences of argument and carefully delineated

character development as much as by plot twists, and rich with reworked tropes and images from the treasure house of past sf. There is much action, but much of it, such as Hanuman's discovery of a vast dead god, or Danlo's apprentice flights through the mathematical manifolds, is deliberately backgrounded. Unlike his father, Danlo is a celebratory, not anguished, hero. His wounds are blows of fate, not marks on his psyche; his joy at the complexity of creation is directly contrasted with Hanuman's creed that all decays, a contrast which one suspects may be the heart of the trilogy. At the end of the book, Danlo sets out on his voyage to the heart of the imminent destruction of the galaxy. It will be a long and difficult voyage, Reader, but you have only yourself to blame if you do not follow him.

After a long silence, broken only by a handful of short stories and the novelization of the movie *Millennium*, for which he laboriously inflated the screenplay from his short story "Air Raid," John Varley returns to print with **Steel Beach** (HarperCollins, £8.99), and returns to the future history detailed in a novel and a clutch of short fictions which dominated the field in the 1970s. The distinguishing characteristic of those of Varley's fictions set in the Eight Worlds sequence is the highly detailed depiction of an attractive future solar system buzzing with activity and bursting with ideas. Humanity has been eliminated on Earth by the Invaders, mysterious gas-giant dwellers who have reserved the Earth for cetaceans, which are wiser than us. Humanity is crammed into footholds in the rest of the solar system, and the largest of these is Earth's Moon, which is the setting for *Steel Beach*.

It is 200 years after the Invasion, somewhat earlier than most of the short stories and the single novel, *The Ophiuchi Hotline*, of the Eight Worlds sequence. Humanity has still to come fully to terms with its exile, although on the surface society is utopian enough for most. Instant surgery can change sex and repair most accidental or self-inflicted damage; life spans have been vastly extended by nanotechnology; work is optional and goods are plentiful; vast underground bubbles contain disneylands, recreations of specific Earth ecosystems, for those nostalgic for what has been lost. All this is sustained by the Central Computer, which attends to the running of the artificial environment and monitors the needs of every citizen. The ramifications of longevity, freely available sex-changing and radical cosmetic surgery, guaranteed full employment in a high tech highly automated society, and much else, are explored in a series of vignettes centred

around Hildy Johnson, a reporter for one of Luna's electronic tabloids, who has been commissioned to write a series of articles comparing his society with that of the 20th century.

Hildy is an appealing narrator with a nice line in tough-talking, wise-cracking, world-weary cynicism (just as we bear vestigial claws on the ends of our fingers, so does every profession on Luna manifest borrowed signs as badges: Hildy's name is a badge; so is his hat), and a problem he can't quite acknowledge: he keeps trying to commit suicide. So, he discovers, are a significant proportion of Luna's population – even the Central Computer has been feeling depressed. On this turns the plot, although it is a long time before it appears to begin to move, for the novel is mostly concerned with explicating, through various dramatized setpieces, the compromises that lie behind an apparently utopian solution to living in a totally artificial environment – the steel beachhead of the novel's title. *Steel Beach* is crammed with patented Varley hooks, sucker-punches and abrupt shifts of cognitive estrangement, but it is also wordy. Having suckerpunched you with the revelation that, for instance, Hildy was born a girl, Varley then delivers a lecture on the subject of gender identity, which is like explaining precisely why a joke is funny after delivering the punchline.

The plot grips only in the last quarter, when Hildy discovers that adherents to Heinleinism (naked libertarianism under a recursive name) are the motor for technological change, when the depth of the Central Computer's malaise becomes critical, and when the magic machinery of utopia is dismantled and revealed to be as imperfect as anything else in this universe of discourse. For the first time, we find Varley taking an unabashed lingering gaze at where the genre has come from, instead of where it should be heading. Hildy finds the same solution to his personal malaise as the hero of Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, who was also in communion with an Artificial Intelligence; and like the best of Heinlein's work, *Steel Beach* is both beguiling and full of longueurs, saved from foundering in its own talk because it is packed with more invention than a dozen lesser novels.

Two novels, ostensibly horror, which both turn on spiritual revelation. Garry Kilworth's **Angel** (Gollancz, £15.99) is an efficiently crafted, tightly plotted thriller about the devastating side-effects of a skirmish in the long war between Heaven and Hell. The world is suffering from a spate of arson attacks caused by a mysterious intense white fire. A renegade angel has come to Earth to hunt those who

fell with Lucifer and who have retreated from the ongoing jihad: each fire marks the cleansing destruction of a demon. Two San Francisco police detectives become entangled in the angel's self-imposed mission. Both are walking wounded: one has lost his wife and son to a fire caused by the angel; the other is marked by an incident of desperate violence in his adolescence. Their hunt becomes a crusade. When the angel, oblivious to the suffering it is causing, realizes that the detectives are trying to interfere with its mission and burns down their station in an attempt to kill them, they are forced, in a neat switch, to make an alliance with one of the demons to try and stop the angel's destructive progress.

This twist on the theme of demonic possession is worked through with great panache, narrated in a controlled, detached voice which is particularly telling when applied to the dispassionate angel (although less so when describing the point of view of the bewildered and terrified humans). The rapport between the two detectives is nicely handled, and other characters – a generous prostitute, a theological professor who sets fires because her father abused her, a psycho probation officer – rise above generic stock from which they are fashioned. *Angel* is a fine display of Kilworth's considerable powers as a storyteller, fleshed out with an abundance of gritty detail and twisting through chicanes and abrupt reversals with a verve that burns through the pages.

Graham Joyce's **House of Lost Dreams** (Headline, £15.99) is more of a slow burn than a conflagration. Mike and Kim Hanson have quit England and settled on a small Greek island, where Mike hopes to find inspiration for his painting, but the eponymous house which they rent has a past which slowly pries apart their marriage. Things around them resonate to their desires and fears; a shepherd watches, waiting for disaster; a strange figure is glimpsed pacing the hillside above, a metal-shod punishing angel-militant who may be the leader of an attack that puts Mike in hospital. A visiting couple – Mike has had an affair with the woman – catalyze events. Aided by the shepherd, Mike must now purge himself of a demon on the Path of Souls; Kim must lay the ghost of the house's past; both must fight through thickets of signs made visible towards reconciliation.

The theme of a marriage redeemed by supernatural rite of passage was also the backbone of Joyce's second novel, *Dark Sister* (reviewed in IZ 71), but *House of Lost Dreams* has its own particular strengths, most especially the precise evocation of place and culture of the Greek islands, and the

exhausted hostilities of a fraying relationship. The intrusion of the supernatural is carefully paced, haunting the edge of the narrative rather than dominating it. Joyce is writing within the same area of dark fantasy as Ramsey Campbell and Jonathan Carroll; his fiction is at its most urgent in the carefully structured displacements glimpsed beneath its polished mirror of the world.

Also noted: Iain Banks, the other guise of Iain M. Banks of that ilk, names the guilty in **Complicity** (Little, Brown, £15.99), a moral satire that deliberately inverts the amoral excesses of *American Psycho*. A serial killer is murdering, with complex rhetorical flourishes, public figures who have no time for the niceties that bedevil liberal consciences of the kind possessed by the likes of Cameron Colley, a journalist who is on the edge of uncovering a vast conspiracy. Gradually, he is led into the heart of the killer's crusade, and learns, as do we, that we are all complicit, in our silences and our excuses, in the state of things in the last gasp of the 20th century. Highly recommended.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Mixed Batch of Fantasy

Chris Gilmore

The four books reviewed here all feature important female characters, but have precious little else in common. None is conventional Sword-&-Sorcery, though John Grant's might have been better if he had stuck to that approach: yet they all use magic of one sort or another, they're all written for adults, and they convey the sense of a strong tradition – which is not to say that they all live up to it, since they demonstrate certain of its pitfalls as well.

It's a general rule that the longer the list of acknowledgements, the clumsier and more impoverished will be the style of the book. There are exceptions, however; despite grateful thanks to most of London fandom, some of them twice, **The World** by John Grant (Headline, £5.99) is in general competently written, marred only by heavy use of flashback in the pluperfect tense and this year's tic of excessive abbreviations in the narrative. That's an important virtue, but insufficient to compensate for glaring and pervasive faults of characterization, plotting, construction and taste. *The World*, so annoyingly called, is that of which Albion, the island setting for Grant's earlier book, is a part. Presumably the name in the local language is different,

but we aren't given it, so hard cheese. (Albion has nothing to do with Blake's long and obscure poem, nor has the town of Starveling anything to do with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – this is not a book for the bookish.)

Life is hard in the World; under Grant's hyper-Hobbesian conception of human nature the only rule that holds good is to trust nobody. In particular, trust no one to lie down just because he's dead – people get resurrected by arbitrary means whenever Grant finds something more for them to do. I use the term "people" loosely; the characters include one Alyss, a goddess (sort of; but what sort isn't clear) who could resolve the whole mess in double quick time if she felt like it, but she doesn't, because then there'd be no story. Instead she goes visiting other universes, or on allegorical psychic journeys, leaving her friends to confront the baddies (cannibal gangsters, megalomaniac Queen Anya) on their own.

Said friends include Rehan, a pointlessly OTT gallant who always bungles his fight scenes by sheer inattention; Alven, a boy herdsman who knows nothing much about anything and fades out halfway through; and Reen, a stock feisty grandmother. At one point, as a by-product of psychic shenanigans, the ghost of Syor, mother of Queen Anya, gets grafted onto Rehan, but she's of little help. There's a vague feeling that it might be better if Anya didn't kill or maim quite so many people, but none of the four has any real idea why she does it or how to stop her. On the other hand, Anya's out-of-favour consort, Ngur, reckons painting mural portraits of Syor in the villages of Albion might help. Well, why not? There aren't any rules and no one has a better idea.

The lack of rules is pervasive, and prevents even single scenes from working properly. One one occasion two people have been drugged and thrown into an oubliette. Their captors fail to disarm them (I suppose *Neighbours* was about to start), so when they come to they set about liberating themselves by starting a fire. Nine or ten captors, armed with revolvers and tommy guns, turn up to investigate but are no match for the gallant pair, who finish the lot with swords and daggers.

Phase shift. We're back on Earth, where someone who got gruesomely killed in Albion has been reincarnated as a totally different character – only the name is the same. Which is an emanation of whom, and does it matter? No, because by this time the whole business is so lacking in form and continuity that one might as well read a random selection of Chapter Ones. And there's lots more – a potentially infinite amount, because the underlying metaphysic allows infinite variability in all directions. Grant offers

samples, in the style of the closing passages of Shekley's *Mindswap* though without the wit; then he appends a "bibliography" of popular science books from which the whole mess is supposed to derive. Those I have read are about other matters entirely, but if you want to see some of the same ideas applied with proper discipline, try "The Testament of Andros" (James Blish), *Flight Over Fire* (Jenny Jones) and/or *Schrödinger's Cat* (Robert Anton Wilson).

As is well known, the Chinese waste nothing. This being so, it is not surprising that their magic should be as ghoulish as their cuisine is parsimonious. **Mortal Mask** by Stephen Marley (Legend, £4.99) opens with an act of piety which looks more like necromancy, and continues with much more of the same as variously mortal wizards and supernatural beings slug it out for dominance on the astral and terrestrial planes. To enhance the tension the physical action takes place in the claustrophobic atmosphere of a monastery on a bay surrounded by impenetrable forest. Spiritually the principals may be able to visit the Moon or ancient Egypt, but their bodies are trapped in a building of intentionally ill-omened design and its disagreeable environs: a village of religious maniacs whose only tourist attraction is an open-air necropolis.

The story is complex, and based partly on the misapprehension of Chia, quasi-immortal, semi-human sorceress of Sapphic tendencies, as to who is behind the worst of the mayhem. She blames her wholly demonic twin brother, but a thoroughly nasty piece of work called Aklo, who rather obviously stands for all Marley dislikes in current western society, is there to show that man's inhumanity to man has the fiends on the ropes, as usual. Meanwhile, others are more inclined to blame Chia, whose sanguinary reputation is perhaps exaggerated but far from unfounded.

Because so many of the characters are archetypal there's little of normal psychological motivation; instead we have an obsession with masks and faces, on the magical, symbolic and (most of all) grossly physical levels. Some of the scenes are not for the squeamish, with corpses in various states of preservation/re-animation/transformation/merging outnumbering the conventionally living as often as not, but the grue is never gratuitous, and all makes sense in terms of Marley's powerful vision of a Dark Age China that never existed, but surely should have done. *Mortal Mask* offers nothing much in the way of philosophical insight, moral involvement or psychological depth, but works well enough as entertainment if you like it grim.

After the two above it was a relief to enter the comparatively sane and staid company of Deborah Grabien. Emily Moon-Bourne, heroine of **And Then Put Out the Light** (Pan, £4.99) is a large lady, never beautiful and now pushing forty, who decides in the wake of a profitable but wounding divorce to visit Europe. Her unstated but patent intention is to star in her own re-make of *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone*, but once she gets to Italy it is her uncomfortable experience to meet the Man of her Dreams – literally. A classic Latin lover (except that he's English – and don't laugh), he has haunted her imagination since adolescence; and here he suddenly is, known only as Martin (in one form or another the commonest name in Europe) and typecast as Lucifer in a piece of traditional street theatre. Emily so forgets herself as to go looking for him, but no luck. Instead of trying to find where the troupe will play next she visits England and France, her holiday proceeding much as before, in sight-seeing, conversation with women she meets on the way, and internal monologue disguised as dialogue with her inner self. And if you are by now wondering what gets classified as fantasy nowadays, so was I.

We're three parts through the book, and the only hints of the supernatural are two almost-meetings with Martin (is he following her? if so, how?) and two encounters with unseasonable wasps. Otherwise it's a fictionalized travelogue, and may as such be very useful to a rich, unattached woman touring Europe. It's difficult to see who else would want to buy it – apart from a poorer woman seeking vicarious extravagance. But hold! Martin, having at last let her catch up with him, trifles with Emily's affections to their mutual gratification before abruptly and permanently vanishing. And does it end happily? No chance! Except that it does, sort of. Who said escapist literature was dead?

Having caught my breath, I dived into Keren Gilfoyle's **A Shadow on the Skin** (Headline, £5.99). It was worth the wait. Here the magic is good old-fashioned psi (psychemantics to Gilfoyle), and it runs in the Desaignes family. They have used it to dominate their world of Kidroie (which has a Dutch accent) for several generations, and in order to strengthen it have inbred with Ptolemaic fervour. But in the current generation the powers are blocked; of the pure blood, only Halenne, an old woman, still has the Inheritance to the fullest, while the only young people with a worthwhile share are sundry bastards gotten on mere human slaves. The brothers Nikleis and Tobias are not technically bastards, being the sons of a hostage princess, ravished and then married by

force; but neither offers much comfort to the family. Nikleis is vain, vicious and unstable, while Tobias hates all the Desaignes stand for, preferring to live in a swamp with the fen people. There he has come under the influence of the local Old [wise] Woman, who knows what he is and intends to use him, both directly and at stud. Meanwhile Halenne wants him back for much the same reasons.

It's a strong situation, made darker and more complex by the pervasive atmosphere of corruption, panic and sexual revulsion deriving respectively from power misused, power on the ebb and generations of incest; Gilfoyle develops it extremely well, shuttling between Tobias, Halenne and minor characters who include Tobias's nymphomaniac sister and a semi-corporeal being reminiscent of Zelazny's Rakasha. She could easily succumb to the crude dualism of wicked tyranny versus oppressed virtue, but instead she allows Halenne, desperately seeking to preserve the Family power, to become a figure of tragic grandeur. To her the Family has stood for stability, culture and good government, for all that to her mere humans are hardly more than cattle. On the other side, the Old Woman of the fen village is no less concerned to preserve her people and her way of life, and no less willing to manipulate and sacrifice specified individuals for the general good. I haven't come across a fantasy of equal moral and psychological seriousness since Guy Gavriel Kay's *Tigana*, nor is it lacking in pace.

The story itself is fairly simple, resolving into the pursuit of Tobias, principally by Halenne, while he himself strives to come to terms with his own nature and Inheritance. In this he is aided by a hedge-priest who strikes the only false note in the book; he is obviously Christian, but as this is S&S cannot be so described. Gilfoyle would have done better to set her tale on a post-débâcle Earth, with the psi-powers ascribed to mutation. But it's a brilliant novel for all that, and the more remarkable for being described as a first. The ending leaves plenty of scope for a sequel, so I hope for more soon, and my only quarrel with Headline is for being economical with the editing and production. This book should have got maximum hype and the red carpet. It should also contain a map and (especially, with all that incest) a genealogy. Maybe next time?

(Chris Gilmore)

Books Received July 1993

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Ackroyd, Peter. **First Light**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-017115-0, 328pp, paperback, £6.99. (Literary sf novel, first published in 1989.) No date shown: August 1993?

Aldiss, Brian. **Remembrance Day**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-09370-5, 268pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Non-sf novel by a leading sf writer, first published in the UK, 1993.) July 1993.

Barker, Keith, ed. **Graphic Account: The Selection and Promotion of Graphic Novels in Libraries for Young People**. Library Association/Youth Libraries Group [c/o Remploy Ltd., London Rd., Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs. ST5 1RX], ISBN 0-946581-16-9, 56pp, paperbound, no price shown. (Collection of essays on, and annotated bibliographies of, graphic novels; first edition; it's an A4-size stapled pamphlet with a full-colour cover and some black-and-white interior illustrations; recommended; the major piece is by Andy Sawyer, who is a past contributor to *MILLION* and has recently been appointed Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation collection at Liverpool University.) Late entry: May 1993 publication, received in July.

Bell, Clare. **The Jaguar Princess**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-09704-2, 435pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set in pre-Columbian Mexico; the author, who lives in California, has previously written three young-adult fantasies in the "Ratha" series, and has co-written a trilogy of "Polynesian prehistoric novels under the name Clare Coleman.") October 1993.

Bloch, Robert, ed. **Monsters in Our Midst**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85049-2, 301pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Horror/suspense anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains all-new stories about psychopaths and serial killers by Ray Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll, Ed Gorman and a bunch of the usual suspects; Martin H. Greenberg is co-editor, according to the copyright details.) November 1993.

Brown, Eric. **Meridian Days**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32716-X, 165pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 67.) 13th August 1993.

Burroughs, William S. **The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945-1959**. Edited by Oliver Harris. Picador, ISBN 0-330-33074-8, 472pp, hardcover, £17.50. (Letter collection by a maverick American author whose work is regarded by many people as science fiction; first published in the USA, 1993; the majority of these letters were first addressed to Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, and some of them contain "routines" which subsequently found their way into Burroughs's novels.) 27th August 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Doll Who Ate His Mother**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4060-4, 290pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1976; this edition is revised and has a new afterword.) 26th August 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Waking Nightmares**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0165-4, 273pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Andy Robertson in *Interzone* 62.) 22nd July 1993.

Cherryh, C.J. **Faery in Shadow**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-926721-7, 249pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 19th August 1993.

Cherryh, C.J. **The Goblin Mirror**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-925071-3, 331pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 19th August 1993.

Clarke, Arthur C. **How the World Was One: The Turbulent History of Global Communications**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05546-4, 289pp, paperback, £6.99. (History of telecommunications from the telephone and transatlantic cables to comsats and fibre-optics, first published in 1992; it's a heavily revised and expanded version of Clarke's earlier book *Voice Across the Sea* [1958]; it also includes reprints of a couple of his pertinent sf short stories such as "I Remember Babylon" [1960].) 15th July 1993.

Constantine, Storm. **Sign for the Sacred**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4094-9, 567pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993.) 26th August 1993.

Cook, Robin. **Terminal**. Macmillan London, ISBN 0-333-59539-4, 445pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Hi-tech medical thriller, first published in the USA, 1993.) 27th August 1993.

Cooper, Louise. **The Pretender: The Chaos Gate Trilogy, Book 2**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21491-7, 377pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; this is the first HarperCollins sf/fantasy small-format paperback we've seen which drops the "Grafton" name; so farewell, Grafton, and Fontana, and Granada, and Panther, and Mayflower...) 16th August 1993.

Coyle, Harold. **Trial by Fire**. Penguin/Signet, ISBN 0-45-117510-7, 446pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future technothriller, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 69.) 29th July 1993.

Day, David. **The Tolkien Companion**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-1594-6, 272pp, paperback, £5.99. (Illustrated A-Z of J.R.R. Tolkien's writings and imaginary characters; first published in 1991 [?]; the publishers don't make the book's provenance clear, but we seem to remember it coming out in hardcover from Mitchell Beazley a couple of years ago.) 24th June 1993.

De Lint, Charles. **Into the Green**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-08087-5, 253pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1993.

Dickson, Gordon R. **Young Bleys**. "The latest novel in *The Childe Cycle*." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-161-9, 456pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 48.) 26th August 1993.

Eddings, David. **Domes of Fire: The Tamuli, Book One**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21313-9, 584pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 26th July 1993.

Eddings, David. **The Shining Ones: The Tamuli, Book Two**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13846-7, 472pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 2nd August 1993.

Farris, John. **Catacombs**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-05580-9, 493pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1982; third NEL printing.) 5th August 1993.

Farris, John. **Nightfall**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-41729-8, 311pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987; second NEL printing.) 5th August 1993.

Farris, John. **The Uninvited**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-05715-1, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1982; third NEL printing.) 5th August 1993.

Ford, John M. **Growing Up Weightless**. Tor, ISBN 0-553-37306-4, 246pp, trade paperback, \$11.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th October 1993.

Gilbert, Harriet, ed. **The Sexual Imagination from Acker to Zola: A Feminist Companion**. Cape, ISBN 0-224-03535-5, xii+290pp, trade paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated A-Z of sexual themes in the arts, first edition; this nicely produced oddity is not really large enough or comprehensive enough to be called an "encyclopedia of erotica" [it has a mere 350 entries]; but it contains short essays on "Fantasy Fiction" and "Science Fiction," written by Roz Kaveney, as well as entries for individual authors such as William S. Burroughs, Angela Carter, Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ; it should be of interest to some sf/fantasy readers.) 19th August 1993.

Grant, Charles L. **Raven**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57730-9, 214pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 5th August 1993.

Green, Simon R. **Down Among the Dead Men**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05618-5, 221pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 30th September 1993.

Hambly, Barbara. **Magicians of the Night**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21697-9, 413pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 64.) 26th July 1993.

Hartwell, David G., ed. **Christmas Forever: All New Tales of Yuletide Wonder**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85576-1, 401pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains previously unpublished stories by Joan Aiken, Michael Bishop, Charles de Lint, Alan Dean Foster, Damon Knight, David Langford, Patricia McKillip, Rudy Rucker, Robert Sheckley, Brian Stableford, Gene Wolfe, Roger Zelazny and many others.) November 1993.

Hill, Douglas. **The Lightless Dome**. "Book 1 in a brilliant new series. *The Apotheosis Trilogy*." Pan, ISBN 0-330-32770-4, ix+304pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 13th August 1993.

Holdstock, Robert. **The Hollowing**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13834-3, 314pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a new book in the "Mythago" sequence.) 2nd August 1993.

Jefferies, Mike. **Stone Angels**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-223955-8, 301pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 19th August 1993.

Johnson, Glen Ashley. **Angel Kagoule**. Carphology Collective [220 Alfreton Rd., Nottingham NG7 3PE], ISBN 1-874196-01-X, 55pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy story-and-verse collection, first edition; a small-press item by a new writer.) No date shown: July 1993?

Jones, Stephen. **The Illustrated Dinosaur Movie Guide**. Introduction by Ray Harryhausen. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-487-7, 144pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Guide to sf/horror films, first edition; a well-timed and appa-

rently comprehensive illustrated listing of all the prehistoric-monster movies ever made; we note with amusement that Howard Hawks's screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby* [1938] gets an entry - well, it does feature a brontosaurus skeleton.) 16th July 1993.

Kearney, Paul. **A Different Kingdom**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05589-8, 310pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 29th July 1993.

Kearney, Paul. **The Way to Babylon**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05569-3, 349pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) 29th July 1993.

Kerr, Philip. **A Philosophical Investigation**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-917821-4, 360pp, paperback, £4.99. (Futuristic crime novel, first published in 1992; it has been praised by Ruth Rendell and others and compared to the work of Borges; see the interview with Philip Kerr in *MILLION* no. 4.) 5th August 1993.

Koontz, Dean. **Mr Murder**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0832-8, 409pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; the accompanying publicity sheet tells us that Koontz "has sold over 100 million copies of his novels worldwide.") 9th September 1993.

La Plante, Richard. **Leopard**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90410-4, 388pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; sequel to the same author's *Mantis*; proof copy received.) 11th November 1993.

Le Guin, Ursula K. **Always Coming Home**. Illustrated by Margaret Chodos. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647595-7, 563pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; although it's quite an old book, this is the first British mass-market paperback edition.) 16th August 1993.

Little, Bentley. **The Summoning**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0815-8, 342pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1993; proof copy received.) 14th October 1993.

McAleer, Neil. **Odyssey: The Authorised Biography of Arthur C. Clarke**. Foreword by Patrick Moore. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05573-1, xii+430pp, paperback, £5.99. (Biography of the major sf author, first published in 1992; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 69.) 29th July 1993.

McAvoy, R.A. **Winter of the Wolf**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0668-6, 185pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; third in the trilogy which began with *Lens of the World*.) 19th August 1993.

Mahes, Chola. **Freedom Convoy**. Dorrance [643 Smithfield St., Pittsburgh, PA 15222, USA], ISBN 0-8059-3305-0, 274pp, trade paperback, \$14.95 or £7.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a *Mad Max*-type post-holocaust adventure; the author is 21, born in London of Sri Lankan parents, and this is his first novel.) No date shown: summer 1993?

Mann, Phillip. **A Land Fit for Heroes: Book 1, Escape to the Wild Wood**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05515-4, 284pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition.) 22nd July 1993.

Mann, Phillip. **Master of Paxwax: Part One of The Story of the Gardener**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05572-3, 280pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1986; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 17.) 22nd July 1993.

May, Julian. **Jack the Bodiless: Volume 1 of The Galactic Milieu Trilogy**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-28553-X, 495pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991;

reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 62.) 13th August 1993.

Meyrink, Gustav. **Walpurgisnacht**. Translated by Mike Mitchell. Introduction by Ingrid O. Fischer. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-50-X, 169pp, paperback, £6.99. (Literary fantasy novel, first published in German, 1917.) 16th August 1993.

Miller, Walter M. **A Canticle for Leibowitz**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-014-0, 356pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; a five-star book, one of the all-time classics of sf.) 22nd July 1993.

Pratchett, Terry. **Men at Arms**. "A Discworld Novel." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05503-0, 288pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1993.

Raymo, Chet. **The Dork of Cork**. Bloomsbury, ISBN 0-7475-1340-6, 354pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Literary fantasy [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1993; hard to tell whether this strange-looking book with the off-putting title is really sf/fantasy, but it may be; the author is a professor of astronomy in America.) 29th July 1993.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **Cloud Castles**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05203-1, 284pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 28th October 1993.

Russell, Eric Frank. **The Great Explosion**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-991-X, 160pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1962; an expansion of the short story "...And Then There Were None" [1951] and one of Russell's most fondly remembered works.) 16th August 1993.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Berserker Kill**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85266-5, 446pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Shaw, Bob. **Warren Peace**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04918-9, 217pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; a belated follow-up to *Who Goes Here?* [1977].) 22nd July 1993.

Shaw, Bob. **Who Goes Here?** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05678-9, 219pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1977; second VGSF printing.) 22nd July 1993.

Sheffield, Charles. **Godspeed**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85317-3, 352pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1993.

Smith, Cordwainer. **The Rediscovery of Man: The Complete Short Science Fiction of Cordwainer Smith**. Edited by James A. Mann. Introduction by John J. Pierce. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0203, USA], ISBN 0-915368-56-0, xvi+671pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains all the author's sf except for the novel *Norstrilia*; "Cordwainer Smith" was a pseudonym of Paul Linebarger, who died in 1966; this is a handsomely produced book, very reasonably priced for its size.) Late entry: June 1993 publication, received in July.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Beauty**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21305-8, 476pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 65.) 26th July 1993.

Vance, Jack. **Planet of Adventure**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85487-0, 541pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf omnibus, first published in the UK, 1985; proof copy received; it contains the four novels *City of the Chasch* [1968], *Servants of the Wankh* [1969], *The Dirdir* [1969] and *The Pnume* [1970].) October 1993.

Vinge, Joan D. **Catspaw**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31551-X, 454pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 13th August 1993.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Hand of Chaos: A Death Gate Novel**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02389-7, xxv+463pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; fifth in its series.) 22nd July 1993.

White, Michael, and Gribbin, John. **Einstein: A Life in Science**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71170-9, 279pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Biography of the great scientist, first edition; a sort of companion volume to the same authors' *Stephen Hawking: A Life in Science*, this is an easy-to-read account of Einstein's career; co-author Gribbin has published several sf novels as well as scores of pop-science books.) 26th August 1993.

Willey, Elizabeth. **The Well-Favored Man: The Tale of the Sorcerer's Nephew**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85590-7, 440pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by a new American writer, it comes with advance praise from Ellen Kushner and others.) October 1993.

Willis, Connie. **Doomsday Book**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57987-5, 650pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; winner of the 1993 Nebula Award for best sf novel; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 62.) 5th August 1993.

Wolf, Leonard. **The Glass Mountain**. Overlook Press, ISBN 0-87951-498-1, 243pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; described as a "psychosexual fable," partly involving the threat of incest between a king and his daughter, this is possibly a first novel, although the Romanian-born author is already known for his poetry, translations and non-fiction on horror-related topics; he also happens to be the father of Naomi Wolf, feminist author of *The Beauty Myth* – which is interesting, given the theme of this novel.) 17th December 1993.

Wolfe, Gene. **Pandora by Holly Hollander**. Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-85298-3, 198pp, trade paperback, \$8.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) July 1993.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

The following is a list of all books received which fall into the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc). For some definitions of terminology, see David Pringle's "Of Sequels and Prequels – and Sequels by Other Hands" in *MILLION* no. 9; and watch out for our forthcoming feature on movie novelizations.

Bishop, David. **The Savage Amusement**. "Judge Dredd." Virgin, ISBN 0-352-32874-6, 262pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf spinoff novel, first edition; it derives from the well-known futuristic comic strip which originated in 2000 A.D.; the author is the editor of *Judge Dredd The Magazine*; first of a series, of which the publishers state: "The stories are completely original although they do contain elements of the comic strip.") 19th August 1993.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **Rama Revealed**. "The astonishing finale to the Rama story." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05577-4, 479pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; third of a sharecropped trilogy [mainly by Gentry

Lee] based on Clarke's original novel *Rendezvous with Rama*.) 14th October 1993.

David, Peter. **Star Trek: Who Killed Captain Kirk?** Illustrated by Tom Sutton, Ricardo Villagran and others. Introduction by George Takei. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-493-1, 176pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff graphic novel, first edition; originally published as *Star Trek* comic nos. 49-55, 1988.) 26th August 1993.

Dauids, Paul and Hollace. **Prophets of the Dark Side: Star Wars, Book 6**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40532-2, xiv+95pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 5th August 1993.

Dauids, Paul and Hollace. **Queen of the Empire: Star Wars, Book 5**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40531-4, xiv+94pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 22nd July 1993.

Grant, Charles L., ed. **In the Fog: The Final Chronicle of Greystone Bay**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-09703-4, 300pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Shared-world horror anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains new stories by Craig Shaw Gardner, Nancy Holder, Katherine Ptacek, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and others.) October 1993.

Koontz, Dean. **The Funhouse**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3898-7, 313pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror-film novelization, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Owen West," 1980; this edition has a 1992 afterword in which the author explains the book's genesis; it was based on a screenplay by Larry Block.) 26th August 1993.

McCaffrey, Anne, and Jody Lynn Nye. **Crisis on Doona**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-123-6, 476pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; a sharecrop [i.e. it was probably written by Jody Lynn Nye solus] set in the world of one of McCaffrey's earlier novels; it's copyrighted "Bill Fawcett and Associates" – a packaging company; the print is very large.) 22nd July 1993.

Milan, Victor. **From the Depths**. "Star Trek 61." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-467-2, 280pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993 [?].) 19th August 1993.

Peel, John. **Doctor Who: The Evil of the Daleks**. "Number 155 in the Target Doctor Who Library." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20389-5, 288pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series novelization, first edition; based on the BBC TV serial by David Whitaker first broadcast in 1967.) 19th August 1993.

Perham, Molly. **King Arthur & the Legends of Camelot**. Illustrated by Julek Heller. Dragon's World, ISBN 1-85028-226-9, hardcover, £14.95. (Fantasy retelling, first edition; yet another version of the Matter of Britain; the Arthurian cycle represents one of the oldest fantasy "shared worlds," dating back to the Middle Ages; this volume is attractively illustrated, mainly in black and white with some colour.) 26th August 1993.

Robinson, Nigel. **Birthright**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20393-3, 216pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 19th August 1993.

Stone, Dave. **Deathmasques**. "Judge Dredd." Virgin, ISBN 0-352-32873-8, 261pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf spinoff novel, first edition; based on the comic strip which originated in 2000 A.D. magazine.) 19th August 1993.

Tine, Robert. **Last Action Hero**. Warner,

ISBN 0-7515-0744-X, 236pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy-film novelization, first published in the USA, 1993; based on a script by Shane Black and David Arnott for the movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger; curiously, a note on the copyright page states: "Certain incidents are based on Richard Prather's *The Meandering Corpse*"; see the article on Richard S. Prather's crime novels which we ran in *MILLION* no. 11.) 22nd July 1993.

Trilling, Roger, and Stuart Swezey, eds. **Wild Palms Reader.** "From the Oliver Stone TV mini series written by Bruce Wagner." Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0746-6,

128pp, trade paperback, £12.99. (Sf TV series companion, first published in the USA, 1993; this large-format book, which is neither a novelization nor a graphic novel [though it resembles the latter] but a collection of articles, fictions, extracts, illustrations and unclassifiable material described as a "psychedelic dossier," has the most amazing credits: based mainly on script material by Bruce Wagner [who wrote the highly praised Hollywood novel *Force Majeure*, 1991], it has contributions from Pat Cadigan, Thomas M. Disch, William Gibson, E. Howard Hunt, Malcolm McLaren, Hans Moravec, Genesis P. Orridge, Norman Spinrad, Bruce Sterling, Peter

Wollen and various freaky screenwriters and other folk, with a cover photograph and other pics by Ana Barrado [who was the main illustrator for Re/Search's J.G. Ballard "special," 1984, and *The Atrocity Exhibition*, 1990]; it's all very hip!) 23rd September 1993.

Veitch, Tom. **Star Wars: Dark Empire – The Collection.** Illustrated by Cam Kennedy. Introduction by Kevin J. Anderson. Dark Horse Comics, ISBN 1-878574-56-6, unpaginated [circa 150pp], trade paperback, \$16.95. (Sf movie spinoff graphic novel, first edition.) Late entry: May 1993 publication, received in July.

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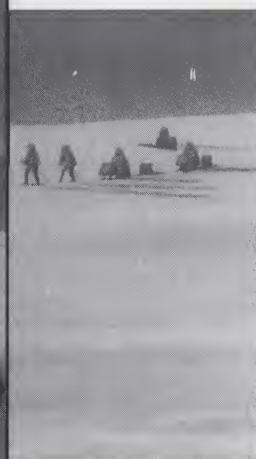
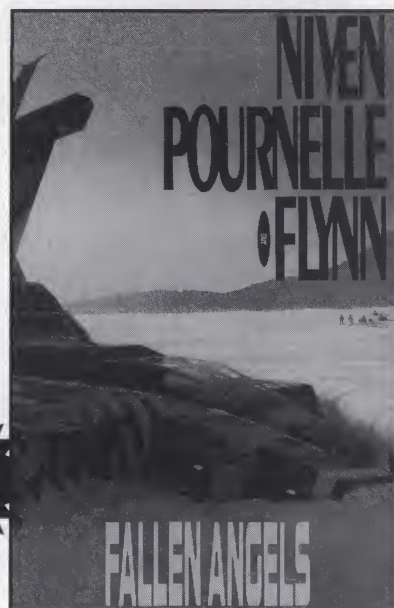
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